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RENAN'S ANTICHRIST. TRANSLATED,  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY WILLIAM  
G. HUTCHISON.

LONDON: WALTER SCOTT, LTD.,  
PATERNOSTER SQUARE.

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE



EXIGENCIES of space have compelled me to omit from the present translation of Renan's *Antichrist*—so far as I know the sole existing English rendering—the author's preface, copious footnotes, and appendix. These features, however, appeal rather to the specialist than to the general reader, and for the latter their absence scarcely impairs the interest of the work itself. This last consideration has also deterred me in my introduction from entering at any length on the subject of Renan's authorities, and the various critical questions raised by his selection and use of these authorities. I have, however, thought it desirable to collate all the biblical citations with the Revised Version of the English Bible, and to give the references.

I owe many thanks to Mr Henry Hooton and to my wife for their useful suggestions.



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## INTRODUCTION

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*L'ANTÉCHRIST*, the fourth volume of Renan's *magnum opus*, *Les Origines de la Christianisme*, appeared in 1873. Four years had elapsed since the publication of the preceding volume of the series, *St. Paul*; but during these four years other works had come from the author's pen, notably the collection of essays entitled *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, in which with aspirations, up till now destined to remain unrealised, for the revival of monarchy and a restricted franchise, were mingled counsels of the sanest order for the future of his country. It was a time indeed for taking counsel, for revising ideals, a time when it was eminently desirable that coolly-conceived and dispassionate opinions should be heard and considered. From lying prostrate at the feet of her German conquerors, France had scarce arisen before she was again involved in strife, and this time in a strife the more terrible in that it was Frenchmen who slew Frenchmen, brothers who put brothers to the sword and made of Paris an anteroom to hell. But it was hardly to be expected that in the midst of all the hubbub a voice from the study should be heeded; Renan knew it well and had hard words for the Deputies of Paris. Had he been one, he is reported to have said

in the *Journal* of the Goncourts, he would have gone about the streets like a second Jeremiah, haranguing the populace group by group. An admirable aspiration truly ; but the idea of Renan as a street-corner orator has its humorous side. It is to be feared that the loafers and sons of toil who would have formed his audience would have been rather perplexed than edified by the great historian's gift for the paradoxical expression of nuances of feeling and thought, and by his habit, a fatal one for a politician, of seeing several sides of a question at once.

Sickened by the awful sight presented by Paris, Renan, a greatly disenchanted optimist, retired to Versailles in April 1871. It was there that, prevented by the absence of his books from proceeding with his work on the *Antichrist*, he put his thoughts on paper in the series of colloquies concerning God, the universe, and mankind, which was published five years later under the title of *Dialogues philosophiques*. It is a book of disillusionment and transition ; the Renan of the first period, lingering in words of honeyed sweetness over the beauties of sentimental religion, has to a great extent disappeared ; the Renan of later years, with his good-humoured cynicism, his large tolerance of the absurdities and limitations of men, his light-hearted resignation to the will of the unknown God, has yet to be born. Here we have him in an intermediate stage as the precursor of Nietzsche, dreaming of the subjugation of democracy by a caste of philosopher-tyrants, who would lord it over the underlings by both the moral and the material power at their command.

Whether the Republican government of that day can be considered as having been either tyrannical or philosophic, it succeeded in stamping out the Communist



revolt in a manner that reminds us that all in this world is action and reaction, and that blind ferocity—have we not our own ‘unsung epic,’ the Indian Mutiny, to call to witness?—begets blind ferocity. Versailles brought Paris to her knees, ending her slow agony with the swift and ruthless justice of bullet and bayonet. And Renan, the new Renan, his former faith in democracy’s divine instincts and divine right rudely shaken, went back to his study, and, fresh from the contemplation of a period of *sturm und drang* in contemporary history, resumed his labours on the most stormy and stressful period in the annals of early Christianity. A journey to Italy and a careful examination of the Roman sites connected with the primitive Church and the Neronian persecutions, formed the final preparation for the work.

It has not been without purpose that I have dwelt on the circumstances attending the composition of the *Anti-christ*, the author’s intellectual and material environment while it was in progress. How greatly the *année terrible* had impressed him is apparent both on the surface and between the lines of his book. In his preface he tells us that he has often reproached himself for finding such pleasure in his study, while his poor country was being consumed with long and heartrending sufferings. But his conscience, he hastens to add, is tranquil. He has done what he could. In 1869, when he stood for election, he denounced war and revolution as equally fatal to the public interest; in September, 1870, he conjured the enlightened minds of Germany and Europe to think of the frightful misfortune menacing civilization; in Paris, during the siege, he achieved unpopularity by advising the appointment of an assembly with powers to treat for peace; since then, he has given his best endeavours to the

promotion of order and reform. He has done what he could for the State ; in this and his other works he believes he has done what he could for that which he conceives to be true religion, by attempting to free it from the excrescences of dogma and superstition. Man has need of the State, but not less has he need of the Church. Yet if it is to endure, the Church must have a new reformation and establish itself on a surer foundation. 'To simplify religion more often means to strengthen than to destroy it.' To simplify religion, to rid its organism of atrophied and unessential members, it is necessary to go back to its beginnings, and ascertain, so far as is possible, its primitive tenets, the principles animating its earliest adherents, the lines on which its development proceeded. Thus Renan, in writing his great history, might reasonably claim that he was not only engaged on a work of erudition, but, over and above that, in the task of dividing wheat from tares, and showing wherein the Christian religion is a reasonable faith, and wherein it is an edifice built on the shifting and unstable sand of unsupported hypotheses accepted without question in ages of uncritical credulity. Incidentally he was also raising a monument of literary style, and presenting the world with the interesting spectacle of one of the most acute, certainly the broadest and most delicately sensitive of modern European intellects of the first rank, confronting and appreciating the eternally absorbing problem of God, man, and the universe in general, and that phase of it which we know as Christianity in particular.

In any history of Christian beginnings the period covered by the present volume must be regarded as having an importance only exceeded by the years during which the founder himself walked and taught upon the earth. It was

the age that saw the Christian faith cut free from the trammels of Judaism, the first great era of Gentile conversion and persecution. It was the age of Paul and Nero, Peter and John of Gischala, the Apocalypse and the fall of Jerusalem, an age of violent contrasts, of lurid colour, of extremes in piety and wickedness, loving-kindness and lust of blood. Out of the war of its contending elements—Judaism, Christianity in its primitive Judaic form, Pauline Christianity, the higher and the lower Paganism—rose, at the touch of its two second founders, Paul and Nero, the Christian faith that was destined to endure. The book, indeed, lacks the unity of its title. It holds more than the life and death of Nero, the Beast of the Apocalypse, his bloody dealings with the Church when alive, the haunting and terror-moving shadow of his memory when dead. The canvas which Renan has undertaken to fill is a spacious one; piety in prison, mad iniquity on the throne, the last great trumpet-blast of Hebrew prophecy, persecution, famine, the grim pageantry of war—all these live in his eloquent pages.

With piety in prison the book opens. Paul, an ‘ambassador in chains,’ the fearless representative of his Lord in the new Babylon, arrives in Rome for his last captivity, the date assigned for the event by Renan being 61 A.D. It is unfortunate that the book of Acts—which, for the previous part of the apostle’s career, that covered in the preceding volume of the *Origines*, affords the authority of a connected narrative, to be used, it is true, with extreme caution, since, not infrequently, it is in contradiction with the authentic epistles—should fail the historian at this interesting point. ‘And he abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the

Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him.'<sup>1</sup> So, leaving one with a sense of provoking incompleteness, the book of Acts abruptly ends. Why this sudden conclusion? Did the author write, or intend to write, a sequel describing what occurred in two years' time? If he did, it has been lost, and the commentator and spinner of hypotheses has been left to give free play to his ingenuity and his imagination. On the whole the most generally accepted theory seems to be that adopted by Renan—Paul's acquittal at the close of his two years' captivity, and his subsequent death either in Spain, or, more probably, during the Neronian persecution. The earliest extant reference to Paul's death is that of Clement in his Epistle to the Corinthians, written towards the close of the first century; but he gives no details as to the time, place, or manner of execution, although, according to Renan and others, he connects the fate of both Peter and Paul with that of the Danaïdes and Dirçæ. Origen, writing at the beginning of the third century, distinctly asserts that Paul suffered martyrdom under Nero at Rome, while a somewhat older contemporary, Tertullian, reports that he was beheaded there. On the other hand a strong case has been made out for Paul's execution, not as a Christian incendiary, but as 'a pestilent fellow, and a mover of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the world,'<sup>2</sup> at the close of his imprisonment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxviii. 30, 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xxiv. 5.

<sup>3</sup> The argument for the earlier date, as presented by a recent writer, Dr McGiffert, may be briefly summarised. A journey to Spain, and there is no trace of such a visit in the tradition of any Spanish Church, is only supported by late and apocryphal documents; a final visit to the East has nothing but the Pastoral Epistles (1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus), the authenticity of which is generally rejected, to give it colour. Moreover, the silence of Acts and all other sources of information forms strong evidence. Had the imprisonment ended in acquittal, the author

But the whole question is one of difficulty and obscurity, and no final solution can be said to have been reached. The one thing clear is that henceforth the historian has to depend for data regarding the apostle's life on chance statements in the Epistles interpreted in the light of the secular history of the time, together with such information gleaned from the Fathers as stands the test of sifting.<sup>1</sup>

At the close of *St. Paul*, Renan sums up what the apostle had accomplished by the time he reached Rome. Half of Asia Minor had received the seed of Christianity; in Europe, Macedonia and Greece had been penetrated; there were converts in Italy. At the same time, although the area covered was so wide, the number of actual converts was not necessarily large; if we are to accept an ingenious calculation of Renan's, which, I own, does not convince me, they

of Acts, who always shows the Romans in the best light possible, would certainly have mentioned it. (*History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age*, pp. 415 *et seq.*)

<sup>1</sup> It may be well to state briefly here Renan's position as regards the authenticity of the New Testament books, other than the Apocalypse, with which I deal elsewhere, used by him in writing the *Antichrist*. The Pauline Epistles to the Philippians, the Colossians, the Ephesians, and to Philemon, which fall within its scope, have not the incontestible authenticity, admitted even by the school of Baur, of Galatians, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and Romans. Philippians however is, he holds, all but certainly the work of Paul, and, in spite of grave difficulties, he also regards Colossians and Philemon as authentic. Ephesians is a doubtful case and has an aspect different from any other of the epistles attributed to Paul. The first Epistle of Peter, and those of James and Jude are likewise doubtful, and 2nd Peter is as certainly apocryphal as 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus. The Epistle to the Hebrews dates from about 66, and its probable author is Barnabas, writing from some large city (perhaps Ephesus) to the faithful at Rome. From this summary of Renan's cautious conclusions, it will be seen that he anticipated in some measure the present reaction in New Testament criticism from the extreme views of Tübingen.

did not exceed a thousand in Asia, Macedonia, and Greece.<sup>1</sup> But however small these congregations originally were, they were living organisms that, as time went on, took firmer root and spread their branches further; and in any case Paul's importance in the history of the Christian Church is not to be measured by the number of conversions which he personally effected. He was handicapped by lack of oratorical power, ill-health, and a temperament that made him sensitive to injuries and slow to forget them. More than this, his task was not alone that of persuading the heathen to accept a Jewish Messiah and of adapting that Messiah to their needs and already existent religious conceptions. He had also the far harder task of persuading the Jewish Christians to give their Messiah to the heathen under reasonable conditions, of transforming, in the teeth of a vigorous and sometimes unscrupulous opposition with *delendus est Paulus* as its watchword, the creed of a Hebrew sect into a universal religion.

'He was ever a fighter,' ever, let it be added, a fanatic, but a fanatic of the better kind, whose zeal was the reverse of narrow and moved on a lofty plane, who at all times followed the injunction of his scriptures to do whatever his hand found to do with all his might. At first his conscientious fanaticism had found an outlet in the business of regenerating the world and extending Jewish monotheism by the congenial method of exterminating Christians. What indeed could the new sect seem in his Pharisaically trained eyes but a mischievous faction which tended to corrupt the ancient Messianic ideal with the belief that the Messiah had already come, in the person of an obscure Galilean peasant, from a village which had anything but a good reputation in the opinion of Jewish respectability, and

<sup>1</sup> *St. Paul*, p. 562, note.



# RENAN'S ANTICHRIST

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## CHAPTER I

### PAUL IN CAPTIVITY AT ROME

IT was a strange epoch in the world's history, and never before, perhaps, had the human race traversed a more extraordinary crisis. Nero was entering upon his twenty-fourth year. The intellect of the unhappy young man, who had been given by an unprincipled mother world-wide dominion at the age of seventeen, was finally giving way. For a long time past those who knew him had noticed many indications that caused them anxiety. His was an inordinately theatrical turn of mind; his nature was evil, hypocritical, flippant, and vain: to an incredible extent he was an amalgam of misdirected intelligence, profound wickedness, and atrocious and cunning egoism, with unheard-of refinements of subtlety. To form a monster of this description, for whom history affords no parallel, for whose like one can only search in the pathological annals of the scaffold, circumstances of a peculiar nature were essential. The school of crime in which he had grown up, his mother's execrable influence, the obligation which was laid on him by that abominable woman, to make almost his first public act a parricide, soon caused him to conceive of the world as a comedy of horrors in which he himself was the leading actor. At the time of which we speak he had entirely with-

drawn himself from the philosophers, his masters, had slain nearly all his kinsmen, and had made the most shameless follies fashionable ; following his example a portion of Roman society had stooped to the last depth of depravity, antique cruelty was reaching its zenith, and the reaction of the just instincts of the people was beginning. About the time of Paul's arrival at Rome, the news of the day was as follows.

Pedanius Secundus, the prefect of Rome, an official of consular rank, had just been assassinated by one of his slaves, not without its being possible to plead extenuating circumstances in defence of the culprit. According to law, all the slaves who at the moment of the crime had been dwelling under the same roof as the assassin, had to be put to death. In the present case there were four hundred of these unhappy wretches. When it became known that this atrocious execution was to take place, the feeling for justice, which slumbers beneath the conscience of the most degraded populace, was spurred to revolt. There was an outbreak, but the Senate and the Emperor decided that the law must take its course.

It may be that among these four hundred innocent folk, immolated by virtue of a hateful law, there was more than one Christian. The bottom of the abyss of evil had been touched, and it was only possible to re-ascend. Moral discussions of a singular nature were in vogue in the highest ranks of society. Four years before, much interest had been aroused by an illustrious lady, Pomponia Græcina, wife of Aulus Plautius, the earliest conqueror of Britain. She was accused of 'foreign superstition.' Always clad in black, she never emerged from her austerity. This melancholy was attributed to horrible memories, above all to the death of her intimate friend Julia, daughter of Drusus, whom Messalina had caused to perish. A son of hers also appears to have been the victim of one of Nero's most monstrous enormities ; but it was clear that Pomponia Græcina bore in her heart a deeper sorrow, and also, perhaps, mysterious hopes. According to ancient custom she was delivered over to the judgment of her husband.



Plautius called together his kinsmen, investigated the matter in a family conclave, and declared his wife innocent. The noble lady lived quietly under her husband's protection many years longer, always sad but highly respected. Apparently she divulged her secret to no one. Who knows if the signs that superficial observer took for those of a gloomy habit of mind were not those of a great peacefulness of spirit, of calm meditation, resigned anticipation of death, disdain for a stupid and corrupt society, the ineffable joy of renunciation of joy? Who knows if Pomponia Græcina were not the first of the great world's saints, the elder sister of Melania, Eustochium and Paula?

This extraordinary state of affairs, if it laid the Church at Rome open to the clash of opposing political forces, gave it by way of compensation an importance of the highest order, although it counted but few adherents. Rome under Nero had no resemblance to the provincial parts of the Empire. She was the centre to which all those who aspired to great things must needs resort. In this respect, Paul was possessed of a kind of profound guiding instinct. His arrival at Rome was an epoch in his life almost as decisive as his conversion. He believed that he had reached the summit of his apostolic career, and was no doubt reminded of the dream in which, after one of his days of strife, Christ appeared to him saying, 'Be of good cheer; for as thou hast testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.'<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the walls of the eternal city were neared, Julius the centurion took his prisoners to the *Castra Prætoriana* built by Sejanus, near the *Via Nomentana*, and handed them over to the prefect of the *Prætorium*. Suitors appealing to the Emperor were on their entrance into Rome regarded as imperial prisoners, and as such confided to the care of the Emperor's body-guard. As a rule, the prefects of the *Prætorium* were two in number; but at the moment there was only one. This important post had been filled since the year 51 by the noble Afranius Burrus, who, one

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxiii. 11.

year later, was to expiate by a painful death, the crime of having desired to do good whilst compounding with evil. There can be no doubt that Paul had no direct relations with him. Perhaps, however, the humane treatment which the apostle appears to have received was due to the influence exercised by this just and virtuous man on those around him. Paul was placed in *custodia militaris*, that is to say, handed over to a Prætorian commissary, to whom he was chained, but neither continually nor in a disagreeable manner. He was permitted to live in a room hired at his own expense, perhaps in the precincts of the *Castra Prætoriana*, where anyone could freely come and visit him. For two years he thus awaited the hearing of his appeal. Burrus died in March 62, and was succeeded by Fenius Rufus and the infamous Tigellinus, Nero's boon companion in debauchery and the instrument of his crimes. From this time forth Seneca withdrew from politics. Nero had no longer any save the Furies for his counsellors.

As we have seen, Paul's relations with the faithful at Rome had begun during the apostle's last stay at Corinth. Three days after his arrival he desired, as was his habit, to put himself in communication with the principal *hakamim*. It was not in the bosom of the synagogue that Roman Christianity had come into being; it was believers who had landed at Ostia or Pozzuoli, who, banding themselves together, had formed the earliest Church in the capital of the world; and this Church had scarcely any connection with the various synagogues of the same city. The immensity of Rome, and the number of the foreigners who brushed shoulders within it, was the reason for there being but little mutual acquaintance, and for its being possible for ideas of sharply diverse orders to grow up side by side without touching each other. Paul, then, was led to act on the principles which he followed, after his first and second mission, in towns to which he bore the germ of the faith. He sent to ask some of the chief men of the synagogue to come and visit him. He described his position under the most favourable light; protesting that he had done nothing

and desired to do nothing against his nation, and that what was at stake was the hope of Israel, that is to say, faith in the resurrection. The Jews replied that they had never heard men speak of him or received any letter about him from Judæa, and expressed a desire to hear him personally express his opinions, 'for,' they added, 'as concerning this sect, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against.'<sup>1</sup> An hour for the discussion was agreed upon, and a good number of Jews assembled to hear the apostle in the little room which he occupied. The dissertation lasted almost a whole day; Paul enumerated all the texts of Moses and the prophets which proved, according to him, that Jesus was the Messiah. Some believed, but the greater number remained incredulous. The Roman Jews prided themselves on their extremely exact observances. It was not in their midst that Paul could have much success. The company dispersed without coming to any agreement; and Paul in his displeasure quoted a passage in Isaiah, a very familiar one in the mouths of Christian preachers, on the wilful blindness of men of hardened hearts who shut their eyes and close their ears that they may neither see nor hear the truth. He is said to have concluded by his usual threat to take to the Gentiles, who would receive him better, the kingdom of God which the Jews would have none of.

As a matter of fact his apostolate among the pagans was crowned by a much greater success. The cell of his captivity became a centre for fervent preaching. During the two years which he passed in it, he was not once hindered in the exercise of his proselytism. Near at hand, he had a few of his disciples, Timothy and Aristarchus at least, and it would seem that his friends took it by turn to remain with him and share his chains. The progress of the Gospel was surprising. The apostle worked miracles, and had the reputation of having spirits and the heavenly power at his command. Thus the captivity of Paul was more fruitful than had been his freedom. His chains, which he dragged behind him at the Prætorium and every-

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxviii. 22.

where exhibited with a sort of ostentation, seemed as it were a sermon in themselves. Following his example, and inspired by the way in which he bore his captivity, his disciples and the other Christians at Rome preached openly and without fear.

At the outset they met with no obstacle. Even Campania and the towns at the foot of Vesuvius received, perhaps from the Church of Pozzuoli, the germs of Christianity, which found in them the conditions to which its growth was accustomed, that is to say, a Jewish soil wherein to be planted. Strange conquests were made. The chastity of the faithful was a powerful attraction; it was by reason of this virtue that several Roman ladies were led to embrace Christianity. With respect to women, indeed, good families still held to a strong tradition of modesty and uprightness. The new sect had its members even in the household of Nero himself, perhaps among the Jews who were numerous in the lower ranks of his service, among those slaves and freed men, organised in companies, whose conditions comprised all that was most degraded and most elevated, most brilliant and most miserable. Some vague indications lead one to believe that Paul had intercourse with members or freed slaves of the family of Annæa. In any case one thing is certain, that henceforth there was a sharp distinction drawn between Jews and Christians at Rome by well-informed people. Christianity appeared a distinct superstition, an outgrowth from Judaism, but the enemy of its mother and hated by its mother. Nero in particular was quite alive to what was going on, and, with a certain curiosity, caused enquiries to be made. It may be that already some of the Jewish intriguers about him were inflaming his imagination on its Oriental side, and had promised him that kingdom of Jerusalem which was the dream of his last hours, his latest hallucination.

We do not know with certainty the name of any of the members of this Roman Church in the time of Nero. A document of dubious value enumerates as friends of Paul and Timothy, Eubulus, Pudens, Claudia, and that Linus

whom ecclesiastical tradition was to present later on as Peter's successor in the episcopate of Rome. We are equally at a loss for evidence wherewith to estimate the numbers of the faithful even approximately.

Everything seemed to be going for the best, but the implacable school, which had taken upon itself the task of warring to the last extremity against the apostleship of Paul, had not fallen asleep. We have seen how the emissaries of these ardent conservatives followed in a measure on his very footsteps, and how the apostle to the Gentiles left in the seas over which he passed a long track of hatred in his wake. Paul, depicted under the likeness of a baneful man, teaching his fellows to partake of flesh sacrificed to idols and fornicate with pagans, is heralded in advance and pointed out for the persecution of all. One can scarcely credit it, but there can be no doubt of its truth since it is Paul himself who is our authority. Even at this solemn and decisive moment he still found paltry passions confronting him. Adversaries in the persons of members of that Judeo-Christian school, whom for the past ten years he had found wherever he went, took it upon themselves to make a kind of counter-propaganda of the Gospel, with a view to doing him an ill turn. Envious, disputatious, and quarrelsome as they were, they sought occasions for crossing him, for aggravating his position as a prisoner, for exciting the Jews against him, for depreciating the merits of his chains. The good will, the love, the respect shown for him by the others, their conviction openly proclaimed that the chains of the apostle were the Gospel's glory and its best defence, consoled him for all these vexations. 'What, after all, does it matter?' he wrote about this time.

Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if to live in the flesh,—if this is the fruit of my work, then



what I shall choose I wot not. But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ ; for it is very far better : yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake.<sup>1</sup>

This grandeur of soul gave him courage, buoyancy of spirit, a marvellous strength. 'Yea,' he writes to one of his Churches, 'and if I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all ; and in the same manner do ye also joy, and rejoice with me.'<sup>2</sup> He believed, however, more willingly in his acquittal, and even in a prompt acquittal ; in it he saw the triumph of the Gospel, and made it a starting point for new projects. It is true that we no longer see his aspirations directed towards the West. It is to Philippi, to Colossæ, that he dreams of retiring until the coming of the Lord. It may be that he had acquired a more precise knowledge of the Latin world, and had recognised that outside Rome and Campania, countries which had by Syrian immigration become very similar to Greece and Asia Minor, he would meet, were it only on account of language, with great difficulties. He knew a little Latin, perhaps, but he was not sufficiently acquainted with it for fruitful preaching. Jewish and Christian proselytism was in the first century but little exercised in the cities which were Latin in the true sense ; it was confined to towns like Rome and Pozzuoli, where, by reason of constant arrivals from the East, Greek was very widely diffused. Paul's purpose had been sufficiently fulfilled ; the Gospel had been preached in the two worlds ; he had, to use the grandiose images of prophetic language, reached the ends of the earth and all the nations under heaven. What Paul now dreamed of was to preach freely at Rome, and then to return to his Churches in Macedonia and Asia, there to await in prayer and ecstasy Christ's coming upon earth.

On the whole, few years in the apostle's life were happier than these. From time to time he was visited by great consolations ; he had nothing to fear from the malevolence

<sup>1</sup> Philippians i. 18 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 17, 18.

of the Jews. The poor lodging of the captive was the centre of astonishing activity.

The follies of profane Rome, her spectacles, her scandals, her crimes, the infamies of Tigellinus, the courage of Thrasea, the horrible fate of the virtuous Octavia, the death of Pallas, touched but little these pious children of the light. The face of this world passes away, they said. Their great imaginings of a divine future made them shut their eyes to the gory mire in which their feet were set. Truly the prophecy of Jesus was accomplished. In the midst of the outer darkness under Satan's kingship, amongst weeping and gnashing of teeth, is founded the little paradise of the chosen. They are there in their world apart, a world of azure depths and exceeding brightness, in the kingdom of God their father. But outside what a hell! . . . O God, the horror of dwelling in that kingdom of the Beast, where the worm is undying and the flame is never quenched!

One of the greatest joys experienced by Paul, at this epoch in his life, was the arrival of a message from his dear Church of Philippi, which was the first he had founded in Europe, and in which he had left behind so many hearts filled with devoted affection. The wealthy Lydia, she whom he called 'his true yokefellow,' did not forget him. Epaphroditus, sent by the Church, brought a sum of money, of which the apostle must have been greatly in need owing to the expenses which his new condition of life entailed on him. Paul, who had always made an exception in favour of the Church of Philippi and from it received what he would not consent to owe to any other, gladly accepted on this occasion its aid once more. The news of the Church was excellent. Some little quarrels between two deaconesses, Euodia and Syntyche, had scarcely troubled its peace. Broils excited by evil-wishers, whence resulted some imprisonments, only served to show the patience of the faithful. The heresy of the Judeo-Christians, the alleged necessity of circumcision, was active around them, but did not succeed in making an entrance. Some bad examples of worldly and

sensual Christians, of whom the apostle speaks with tears, did not come from this Church apparently. Epaphroditus remained with Paul for some time, and, as a consequence of his devotion, had an illness which nearly caused his death. A strong desire to see Philippi once more possessed the excellent man; he longed himself to soothe the anxiety of his friends. And Paul, who also desired to banish the fears of the pious ladies as speedily as possible, promptly sent him home, entrusting to his care a letter to the Philippians written by the hand of Timothy, and breathing tender esteem. Never before had he found such affectionate phrases to express the love for these wholly good, wholly pure Churches which he bore in his heart.

He congratulates them not only because they have faith in Christ, but because they have suffered for him. Those amongst them who are in prison should be proud to undergo the treatment which in the past they saw inflicted on their apostle, and to which they know he is, even at this moment, submitting. They are, as it were, a little chosen group of God's children in the midst of a corrupt and perverse generation, like torches in the midst of a world of shadows. He warns them against the example shown by less perfect Christians, that is to say, by such as have not cast off all Jewish prejudices. Of the apostles of the circumcision he speaks with the greatest harshness:—

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the circumcision: for we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh: though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh, if any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffer-



ings, becoming conformed unto his death ; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect : but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have apprehended : but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.<sup>1</sup>

And he adds,—

For our citizenship is in heaven ; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ : who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself.

Wherefore, my brethren beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved.<sup>2</sup>

Above all, he exhorts them to concord and obedience. The form of life which he has given them, the way in which they have seen him practise Christianity is the good one ; but, after all, each believer has his own revelation, his personal inspiration which also comes direct from God. He beseeches his 'true yoke-fellow' (Lydia) to make Euodia and Syntyche reconciled to one another, to come to their aid, to second them in their duties as servants of the poor. He desires that there may be rejoicing. 'THE LORD IS AT HAND.' His thanks for the gift of money which the wealthy ladies of Philippi have sent him are a model of good grace and warm piety :—

But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived your thought for me ; wherein ye did indeed take thought, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want : for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound : in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me. Howbeit ye did well, that ye had fellowship with my affliction. . . . Not that I seek for the gift ; but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account. But I have all things, and

<sup>1</sup> Philippians iii. 2-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 20, 21 ; iv. 1.

abound : I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.<sup>1</sup>

He recommends humility which makes us look upon others as superior to ourselves, and charity which makes us think more of others than ourselves, following the example of Jesus. Jesus had all divinity at his command ; had he willed it he might have shown himself during his life on earth in his divine splendour ; but in that case the economic scheme of redemption would have been overturned. And so he stripped himself of his natural state to assume the lineaments of a slave. The world saw him in the likeness of a man ; to look only at the outside one might have taken him for a man.

He humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name ; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>2</sup>

One can see how Jesus, hour by hour, was waxing greater in Paul's consciousness. If Paul does not as yet admit his full equality with God the Father, he believes in his divinity, and represents his whole earthly life as the execution of a divine scheme fulfilled by an incarnation. On him captivity had the effect it usually produces on strong souls. It exalted him and worked intense and profound revolutions in his ideas. Shortly after dispatching his Epistle to the Philippians, he sent Timothy to them to glean information of their state and bear them new instructions. Timothy must have returned somewhat promptly. Luke also appears to have been absent for a short time about this period.

<sup>1</sup> Philippians iv. 10-14, 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 8-11.

## CHAPTER II

### PETER AT ROME

PAUL'S chains, his entry into Rome, all forming a triumph according to Christian ideas, and the advantages he gained, moreover, by his residence in the capital of the world, left no peace to the party at Jerusalem. For that party Paul was a kind of stimulant, an active rival, whom they murmured against and yet sought to imitate. Peter, especially, ever divided in his attitude towards his audacious fellow-apostle between an intense personal admiration and the line of conduct imposed on him by his environment, spent his life, which also had its many trials, in copying Paul, in following him from afar in his journeys, in discovering after him the strong positions which could assure the success of their common labours. It was probably by Paul's example that he settled, about the year 54, at Antioch. In the latter half of 61, the rumour which spread through Judæa and Syria of Paul's arrival at Rome, may in the same way have inspired him with the idea of a journey to the West.

It appears that he came accompanied by a whole apostolic society. There was, first of all, his intrepeter, John Mark, called by him 'his son,' who usually followed him about. The apostle John, as we have more than once remarked, also seems to have generally accompanied Peter. Some indications even tend to show that Barnabas was of the group. Finally, it is not impossible that Simon of Gitton was taken to the capital of the world, attracted by the species of charm which that city exercised on all

sectarian leaders, charlatans, wizards, and thaumaturgists. Nothing was more familiar to the Jews than a journey to Italy. Josephus, the historian, came to Rome in the years 62 or 63 to obtain the release of Jewish priests, very holy men, who, for fear of eating anything unclean, lived when in foreign parts on nothing but nuts and figs, and whom Felix had sent to give account of one knows not what offence to the Emperor. Who were these priests? Had their business nothing in common with that of Peter and Paul? The lack of historical proofs leaves much doubt hovering over all these points. The very fact on which modern Catholics found the edifice of their faith is far from being certain. We believe, however, that the Acts of Peter, as related by the Ebionites, were only fabulous in detail. The fundamental conception of these Acts, Peter journeying through the world in the wake of Simon the Magician for the purpose of refuting him, bearing the true Gospel which was to refute the Gospel of the impostor, 'coming after him even as light after darkness, as knowledge after ignorance, as healing after sickness'—this conception is reasonable enough if for the name of Simon we substitute that of Paul, and if in place of the fierce hatred always manifested by the Ebionites towards the preacher to the Gentiles, we imagine a simple opposition in principles, excluding neither sympathy nor concord on the main point, the love of Jesus. In this journey, undertaken by the old Galilean disciple for the purpose of following in the footsteps of Paul, we even admit willingly that Peter, closely pursuing the latter, touched at Corinth where, before his coming, he had a considerable party in his favour. It may also be said that he infused much strength in the Judeo-Christians, to such an extent indeed that, in later years, the Church of Corinth was able to assert that it had been founded by the two apostles, and maintain, making a slight error in dates, that both Peter and Paul had been there at the same time, and had started thence in each other's company to meet their death at Rome.

What were the relations of the two apostles at Rome?

Certain indications suggest the belief that they were fairly cordial. We shall soon see how Mark, Peter's secretary, entrusted with a mission from his master, sets out for Asia bearing a recommendation from Paul; and in addition to this, the epistle attributed to Peter, a writing of very plausible authenticity, exhibits numerous borrowings from the epistles of Paul. There are two truths that must be maintained throughout this history: the first being that profound differences of opinion (far deeper than any of those which, in the succeeding history of the Church, formed matter for schism) separated the founders of Christianity, and that their mutual polemics took, in accordance with the habits of men of the people, a singularly embittered form: the second being that a loftier conception united, even in their lifetime, these brothers at variance, anticipating the great reconciliation which the Church was officially to make between them after their death. This is a frequent phenomenon in religious movements. And, in appreciating these controversies, we must also assign high importance to the fiery and susceptible nature of the Jewish character, with its tendency to violence in language. In these little pious coteries there were constant quarrels and reconciliations; bitter words were used, and yet, nevertheless, there was mutual affection. There was a party for Peter, a party for Paul. But these divisions had not much more consequence than those which, in our own days, separate the various factions of the Positivist Church. About this matter Paul had an excellent saying, 'Let every man remain in that form of teaching which he has received,' an admirable rule which the Roman Church was to observe but little in the years to come. Fidelity to Jesus was sufficient; confessional divisions, if one may thus express it, were simply a question of origin, and independent of the personal merits of the believer.

One fact, however, which is of some gravity, and might lead to the belief that friendly relations were not re-established between the two apostles, is that, in the memory of the succeeding generation, Peter and Paul are leaders of

antagonistic parties in the bosom of the Church, and that the author of the Apocalypse on the morrow of the death of the apostles, at least of the death of Peter, is, of all the Judeo-Christians, the most bitter in his hatred of Paul. Paul looked upon himself as the leader of all converted pagans wherever they might be. Such was his interpretation of the pact of Antioch, but the Judeo-Christians evidently understood it differently. It is probable that the latter party, which had always been very strong at Rome, found in Peter's arrival a good reason for assuming preponderance in power. Peter became its head, and the head of the Church of Rome. Now the unparalleled prestige of Rome gave such a title the highest importance. In the part played by that extraordinary city, men saw the hand of providence. Following on the reaction which arose against Paul, Peter, by virtue of an opposing force, grew more and more the chief of the apostles. The significance of the conjuncture quickly dawned on impressionable minds. The chief of the apostles in the capital of the world—what could be more striking? The great association of ideas, which is to dominate human destinies for thousands of years, is constituted. Peter and Rome become inseparable; Rome is predestined to be the capital of Latin Christianity, and the legend of Peter, first of the Popes, is written in advance, although several centuries will be required for all to be interpreted. Rome, at any rate, scarce suspected that the day on which Peter first set his foot within her bounds was to sway her future, and that the poor Syrian, who had just entered within her gates, was to hold her as his possession for centuries to come.

The situation, moral, social, and political, grew more strained day by day. Men spoke of nothing save marvels and calamities. The Christians were more interested in such things than anyone else, and the idea that Satan was the lord of the world grew more and more deeply rooted amongst them. Spectacular entertainments appeared to them demoniacal. They never frequented them, it is true, but they could not help hearing more worldly people talk



about them. The death of an actor representing Icarus, who, in the wooden amphitheatre in the Campus Martius, attempted to support himself on the air, and finally fell on the very stall of Nero, spattering him with his blood, greatly impressed them, and became the leading incident in one of their legends. Roman crime had reached the last limits of infernal sublimity; and it was already a custom in the sect, whether as a precaution against the police, or from a taste for mystery, to speak of the city only by the name of Babylon. Jews were in the habit of thus applying to modern things symbolical proper names borrowed from their ancient sacred literature.

This scarcely veiled antipathy to a world which they did not understand, became the characteristic feature of the Christians. 'Hatred of the human race' passed for being the sum and substance of their doctrine. Their apparent melancholy was an insult to the 'happiness of the age,' their belief in the end of the world contradicted official optimism, according to which all was born again. The signs of repulsion which they manifested when passing before temples, inspired the belief that they only dreamed of burning them. These ancient sanctuaries of the Roman religion were very dear to patriots; to insult them was to insult Evander, Numa, the ancestors of the Roman people, the trophies of their victories. The Christians were accused of every kind of misdeed, their faith was reputed a sombre superstition fatal to the empire; a thousand tales of abomination or shame were circulated about them; the most enlightened men believed in these stories, and looked upon those thus pointed out for their hatred as capable of all crimes.

The new sect scarcely won any adherents, except among the lower classes. Well bred persons avoided mentioning it by name, or, if obliged to do so, almost excused themselves; but amongst the people its progress was extraordinary; it was like a flood, pent up for a time, that was bursting forth. The Church of Rome was already a people in itself. Court and city began to speak of it seriously; its advance was for some time the topic of the day. Conserva-

tives dreamed with a kind of terror of this cesspool of uncleanness which they imagined in the lower depths of Rome; they spoke with indignation of those evil, ineradicable weeds, that one may tear out, only to see them spring up afresh.

As to the malevolent populace, they cudgelled their brains in the quest for impossible transgressions that might be laid at the door of the Christians. They were held responsible for all public misfortunes. They were accused of preaching revolt against the Emperor, and of seeking to foment insurrection among the slaves. The Christian came to be in public opinion what at times was the mediæval Jew, the scapegoat of all calamities, the man who thought of naught save evil-doing, the poisoner of fountains, the devourer of children, the incendiary. So soon as a crime was committed, the slightest evidence sufficed for the arrest and torture of a Christian. Often the very name of Christian was enough to procure imprisonment. When they were seen shunning pagan sacrifices they were reviled. The era of persecution had indeed begun; and it was to last thenceforth, with short intervals, until the time of Constantine. During the first thirty years which had elapsed since the first Christian preaching, the Jews alone had persecuted the work of Jesus, the Romans had defended the Christians against the Jews. But now the Romans became persecutors in their turn. From the capital the reign of terror and hatred spread to the provinces and provoked deeds of the most crying injustice. With these were mingled abominable pleasantries; the walls of the places in which the Christians were wont to assemble were covered with insulting or obscene caricatures and inscriptions against the brethren and sisters. The custom of representing Jesus under the form of a man with an ass's head was perhaps already in vogue.

None holds in question now that these accusations of crimes and infamy were calumnies; there are indeed a thousand reasons for the belief that the leaders of the Christian Church did not afford the slightest pretext for the ill-will, which was soon to bring upon them such cruel



deeds of violence. All the party chiefs, who shared the direction of Christian society, were in accord with respect to the attitude to be observed towards Roman functionaries. At bottom these magistrates might be regarded as tools of Satan, since they protected idolatry and were supporters of a world delivered over to Satan; but, in practice, the brethren were full of respect for them. The Ebionite faction alone shared the exalted sentiments of the Zelotes and other fanatics of Judæa. In policy the apostles exhibit themselves as essentially conservative and legitimist. Far from urging on the slave to revolt, they desire that the slave be as submissive to his master, even if that master be the most unjust and the harshest, as though he served Jesus Christ in person; and this not of necessity to escape punishment, but as a matter of conscience, because God wills it so. Behind the master there is God himself. Slavery was so far from appearing to be against nature that the Christians had slaves, and slaves who were Christians. We have seen how Paul checked the tendency to political upheavals which was manifested about the year 57, how he preached to the faithful of Rome, and no doubt of many other churches, submission to established powers whatever their origin, and laid down as a principle that the police officer is a minister of God, and that it is only the wicked who dread him. Peter, for his part, was the most peaceable of men. We shall soon find the doctrine of submission to authority taught in his name almost in the same terms as those used by Paul. The school, which later became attached to John, shared the same convictions with respect to the divine origin of sovereignty. One of the leaders' greatest fears was to see the faithful compromised in affairs of doubtful probity, the odium of which recoiled entirely on the Church. The language of the apostles at this supreme moment was scrupulously prudent. Some unhappy wretches who had been put to torture, some slaves who had been scourged, had permitted themselves to have recourse to abuse, calling their masters idolaters, menacing them with the wrath of God. Others, by excess of zeal, loudly

inveighed against pagans and reproached them with their vices. These latter were wittily called by their more sensible colleagues, 'bishops' or 'watchers over those without.' Cruel mishaps fell to their lot; the wise directors of the community, far from exalting them, told them somewhat plainly that they only had what they deserved. All kinds of intrigues, which the insufficiency of documentary evidence does not permit one to unravel, aggravated the position of the Christians. The Jews had great influence with the Emperor and Poppæa. 'Mathematicians,' that is to say, soothsayers, amongst others a certain Balbillus of Ephesus, surrounded the Emperor, and, under pretext of exercising that portion of their art which consisted in averting plagues and evil omens, gave him infamous counsel. Is the legend which mingles with all this world of sorcerers the name of Simon the Magician entirely without foundation? It may be so of course, yet on the other hand there is an equal possibility of the contrary being true. The author of the Apocalypse is greatly concerned about a 'false prophet,' whom he represents as being an instrument of Nero, a thaumaturgist making fire descend from heaven, giving life and speech to statues, branding men with the mark of the Beast. It may be Balbillus of whom he speaks; but it should be noted that the marvels attributed to the False Prophet by the Apocalypse have a strong resemblance to the juggling feats which legend ascribes to Simon. The emblem of the lamb-dragon, under which the False Prophet is designated in the same book, is much better fitted to represent a false Messiah, like Simon of Gitton, than a simple sorcerer. Moreover, the legend of Simon being cast down from heaven is not without analogy to the accident which happened in the amphitheatre, in the time of Nero, to an actor who was playing the part of Icarus. The invariable habit of the author of the Apocalypse to express himself in enigmas casts much obscurity on all these events; but one is not misled in seeing allusions to the most minute anecdotal circumstances of Nero's reign between every line of that strange book.

Never, also, had the Christian consciousness been more oppressed, more breathless with expectation, than at this moment. Men believed themselves in a state of transition of short duration. The solemn vision was awaited from day to day. 'He cometh! . . . Yet a little while! . . . He is at hand! . . .' Such were the phrases that passed from one to another at every instant. The spirit of martyrdom, the thought that the martyr glorifies Christ by his death, and that this death is a victory, was already widely diffused. For the pagan, again, the Christian grew to be considered a piece of flesh and blood naturally destined to torment. There was a drama, which had a great deal of success about this time, called *Laureolus*, in which the principal actor, a kind of knavish Tartuffe, was crucified on the stage, to the applause of the bystanders, and devoured by a bear. This drama was earlier in date than the introduction of Christianity into Rome; it can be ascertained that it was acted from the year 41 onwards; but it seems, at least, to have been made applicable to the Christian martyrs, the fact that the diminutive name of *Laureolus* corresponded to *Stephanos* being possibly the cause of these allusions.

## CHAPTER III

### THE STATE OF THE CHURCHES IN JUDÆA—DEATH OF JAMES

THE ill-will attracted by the Christian Church at Rome, and perhaps even in Asia Minor and Greece, made itself felt as far as Judæa, but there persecution had quite different causes. It was the rich Sadducees, the aristocracy of the Temple, who were bitter in their hatred of these poor honest folk and blasphemed the name of 'Christian.' About the time at which we have now arrived, there was put in circulation a letter written by James, 'a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,' addressed to 'the twelve tribes of the Dispersion.' It is one of the finest fragments of early Christian literature, recalling now the Gospel, now the gentle and resigned wisdom of the book of Ecclesiastes. The authenticity of such writings is, owing to the number of spurious apostolic epistles which were in circulation, always doubtful. It is quite possible that the Judeo-Christian party, which was accustomed to use the authority of James for its own purposes, attributed to him this manifesto, in which the desire to be at variance with the innovators makes itself felt. Certainly, even if James had a share in it, he did not finally commit it to writing. It is doubtful if he knew Greek; his mother tongue was Syriac; and yet the Epistle of James is by far the best written work of the New Testament, its Hellenism is pure and almost classical. Except for this the fragment is in perfect harmony with the character of James. The author is decidedly a Jewish rabbi; he

strongly adheres to the law; to designate the assembly of the faithful he employs the word 'synagogue'; he is hostile to Paul; his epistle resembles in its tone the Synoptic Gospels, which later we shall see emanating from the Christian family of which James had been the head. And yet, nevertheless, the name of Christ is scarcely mentioned more than twice or three times with the simple title of Messiah, and lacks any of the ambitious hyperboles which the ardent imagination of Paul had already begun to accumulate.

James, or the Jewish moralist who wished to cover himself with his authority, introduces us at the outset into a little circle of persecuted folk. Trials are a blessing, for, by putting faith to the test, they produce patience; and patience is the perfection of virtue. The man who has been put to the proof will receive the crown of life. But what above all preoccupies our doctor is the difference between rich and poor. In the community at Jerusalem some rivalry must have arisen between the brethren who were favoured by fortune and those who were not. The latter complained of the harshness and arrogance of the wealthy, and spent their time in mutual lamentation.

Let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate: and the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. . . .

My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing; and ye have regard to him that weareth the fine clothing, and say, Sit thou here in a good place; and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool; are ye not divided in your own mind, and become judges with evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren; did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him? But ye have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you, and themselves drag you before the judgement-seats? Do not they blaspheme the honourable name by the which ye are called?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James i. 9, 10; ii. 1-7.

The pride, the corruption, the brutality and the luxuriousness of the rich Sadducees had, in fact, reached their zenith. Women used to purchase with money from Agrippa II. the pontificate for their husbands. Martha, the daughter of Boëthus, one of these Simoniacs, when she went to see her husband officiate, had carpets laid down from the door of her house all the way to the sanctuary. The pontificate had thus become singularly degraded. These worldly priests blushed at what in their functions was most holy. The sacrificial practices had grown distasteful to people of refinement, condemned by their duty to exercise the functions of butcher and knacker! Several had silken gloves made that they might not soil the skin of their hands by contact with the victims. The whole Talmudical tradition, which on this point is in agreement with the Gospels and the Epistle of James, represents the priests of the last years before the ruin of the Temple, as gourmands, addicted to luxury and hard in their dealings with poor folk. The Talmud contains the fabulous list of what was necessary for the maintenance of a High Priest's kitchen; it surpasses all probability, but is an indication of the prevailing feeling. 'Four cries arose from the courts of the Temple,' runs one tradition: 'The first, "Depart hence, ye descendants of Eli, ye make unclean the Temple of the Eternal;" the second, "Depart hence, Issachar of Kaphar-Barkaï, Thou that hast respect for none but Thyself, and dost profane the victims consecrate to heaven."' (This was he who covered his hands with silk gloves when he performed his functions.) 'The third, "Open, ye gates, and let Ishmaël, son of Phabi, disciple of Pinehas, enter in that he may fulfil the functions of the High Priest;" the fourth, "Open, ye gates, and let John, son of Nebedee, the disciple of the gourmands, enter in, that he may gorge himself with victims."' A kind of song, or rather curse, on the sacerdotal families current about the same period in the streets of Jerusalem has come down to us.

'Cursed be the house of Boëthus!  
Curses light on them because of their staves!



Cursed be the house of Hanan !  
 Curses light on them because of their conspiring !  
 Cursed be the house of Cantheras !  
 Curses light on them because of their kalams !  
 Cursed be the family of Ishmael, son of Phabi !  
 Curses light on them because of their fists !

They are High Priests, their sons are treasurers, their sons-in-law are tax-gatherers, and their servants beat us with staves.'

There was open war between these wealthy priests, friends of the Romans, taking lucrative appointments for themselves and their families, and the poor priests who were supported by the people. Every day sanguinary struggles took place. The pontifical families carried their insolence and audacity so far as to send their servants to the threshing-floors to seize on the tithes which belonged to the higher clergy ; those who refused them were beaten ; the poor priests were in misery. Imagine the feelings of the pious man, the Jewish democrat, rich with the promises of all the prophets, maltreated in the Temple (his home) by the insolent lackeys of Epicurean and sceptical priests ! The Christians of James's group made common cause with these victims of oppression, who were probably, like themselves, holy men (*hasidim*) standing high in popular favour. Mendicity seemed to have become a virtue, and the token of patriotism. The opulent classes were friends to the Romans ; and, in truth, since great wealth depended on the Romans, it could only be acquired by some kind of apostasy and treason. To hate riches was thus a mark of piety. Forced, lest they should die of hunger, to labour on those buildings of the Herods in which they saw naught save a pompous display of vanity, the *hasidim* considered themselves victims of the infidels. ' Poor ' passed for being the synonym of ' holy.'<sup>1</sup>

Go to now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver are rusted ; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. Ye have laid up your treasure in the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out :

<sup>1</sup> See *Life of Jesus* (Scott Library), p. 113 *et seq.*



and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned, ye have killed the righteous one; he doth not resist you.<sup>1</sup>

One can feel how, in these curious pages, the spirit of the social revolutions, which some years later were to drench Jerusalem with blood, was already in a state of ferment. Nowhere is the feeling of aversion from the world, which was the very soul of primitive Christianity, expressed with so much force. 'To keep one's self unspotted from the world' is the supreme precept. 'Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God.'<sup>2</sup> All desire is a vanity and illusion. Since the end is so close at hand, why complain about each other, why go to law? The true judge is coming; he is at the gate.

Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that.<sup>3</sup>

When he speaks of humility, patience, mercy, the raising up of the humble, the joy which dwells in the depths of tears, James seems to have kept in memory the words used by Jesus himself. Nevertheless, it is evident that he strongly holds by the Law; a whole paragraph of his epistle is devoted to warning the faithful against Paul's doctrine regarding the uselessness of works, and salvation by faith. One of James's phrases (ii. 24) is in direct negation of a phrase in the Epistle to the Romans (iii. 28). In opposition to the apostle of the Gentiles (Rom. iv. 1 *et seq.*) the apostle of Jerusalem maintains (ii. 21 *et seq.*) that Abraham found salvation by his works, that faith without works is a dead faith. Demons have faith, and apparently are not saved. Laying aside at this point his customary modera-

<sup>1</sup> James v. 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 13-15.

tion, James calls his opponent 'a vain man.' In one or two other passages one can see indirect allusions to the dissensions which already divided the Church, and were, some centuries later, to fill the history of Christian theology.

A spirit of lofty piety and touching charity animated this Church of saints. 'Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father,' said James, 'is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.'<sup>1</sup> The power of healing diseases, more especially by anointing with oil, was considered as a right held in common by the faithful; even unbelievers saw in this method of therapeutics a gift peculiar to Christians. The older men had the reputation of possessing this power in its highest degree, and thus became, as it were, spiritual physicians. To these practices in supernatural medicine James attaches the highest importance. The germ of nearly all the Catholic sacraments was already instilled. The confession of sins, which had been practised for a long time by the Jews, was regarded as an excellent means of pardon and healing, two ideas which were inseparable in the beliefs of the age.

Is any among you suffering? let him pray. Is any cheerful? let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him. Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.<sup>2</sup>

The apocryphal apocalypses, in which the religious passions of the popular mind were expressed with so much force, were eagerly received in this little group of enthusiastic Jews, or rather grew up at its side, almost in its midst, in such a way that it is often difficult to unravel the tissue of these singular writings from that of the New Testament scriptures. These pamphlets, although they might have come into existence the previous day, were really taken for the authentic words of Enoch, Baruch, and Moses. The

<sup>1</sup> James i. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 13-16.

most extraordinary beliefs about hell, the rebel angels, and the guilty giants who brought about the Deluge, spread abroad and had as their principal source the books of Enoch. In all these fables there are vivid allusions to contemporary events. This prescient Noah, this pious Enoch, who persistently predict the Deluge to a heedless generation that all the time eat, drink, marry, and wax rich, what are they if not the seers of latter days warning in vain a frivolous generation which will not admit that the world is near its end? An entire branch, as it were a period of subterranean life, was added to the legend of Jesus. Men asked themselves what he did during the three days he passed in the tomb. It was asserted that during this period he had, in mortal combat with death, descended into the infernal prisons in which rebellious or sceptical spirits were chained in captivity, and that there he had preached to the shades and demons, and prepared their deliverance. This conception was essential to Jesus being, in the full force of the term, the universal Saviour, to which conception Paul, in his later writings, lends his authority. The fictions in question did not find a place, however, in the contents of the Synoptic Gospels, no doubt because that contents was already fixed when they came into being. They remained floating traditions outside the evangelical texts, and only took their form much later in the apocryphal writing called the 'Gospel of Nicodemus.'

The real work of the Christian genius was, however, being silently accomplished in Judæa and the adjoining countries. The Synoptic Gospels grew member by member, just as a living organism completes itself little by little and, under the action of some mysterious inward consciousness, attains to perfect unity. At the date which we have now reached, did any written text concerning the deeds and works of Jesus already exist? Had the apostle Matthew, to take his case, written out in Hebrew the Lord's discourses? Had Mark, or he who took his name, confided to paper his notes on the life of Jesus? It may be doubted. Paul in particular surely possessed no written account of the words

of Jesus. Did he at least have an oral, in some measure mnemonic, tradition of these words? Such a tradition in the case of the narrative of the Last Supper, perhaps in that of the Passion, and, to a certain extent, in that of the Resurrection, may be remarked in him, but not in the case of the parables and sayings. Jesus is in his eyes an expiatory victim, a superhuman being raised from the dead, not a moralist. His citations of the words of Jesus are uncertain, and do not correspond with the discourses which the Synoptic Gospels put in the mouth of Jesus. Nor do the apostolic epistles, other than those of Paul, which we possess, give any reason to suppose that such a compilation existed.

The conclusion apparently to be drawn from all this is, that certain narratives, such as those of the Last Supper, the Passion, and the Resurrection, were known by heart in terms which admitted but few variations. The scheme of the Synoptic Gospels was probably already fixed; but during the lifetime of the apostles books which professed to crystallize the tradition of which they believed themselves to be the sole depositaries, would have had no chance of finding acceptance. Why, besides, should the life of Jesus be written? He was about to return. A world on the eve of dissolution has no need of new books. It is when witnesses are dead that it is of importance to render durable by writing an image which grows fainter every day. Herein respect the Churches of Judæa and the countries neighbouring on it enjoyed a great superiority. Knowledge of the discourses of Jesus was much more precise and more extended there than elsewhere. In this matter a certain difference can be remarked between the Epistle of James and those of Paul. The little work of James is quite impregnated with a kind of evangelical perfume; at times one seems to hear a direct echo of the speech of Jesus; the Galilean feeling seems to live anew in its pages.

We have no historical knowledge of the missions sent out directly by the Church of Jerusalem. By its very principles this Church must have been but little inclined to propaganda. As a rule there were few Ebionite and Judeo-Christian

missions. The narrow spirit of the *Ebionim* only permitted the employment of circumcised missionaries. According to the picture presented to us in writings of the second century, which, while they may be suspected of exaggeration, are faithful to the Hierosolymite tradition, the Judeo-Christian preacher was looked upon with a certain suspicion; he was subjected to trial; tests were imposed upon him, and a six years' novitiate; he had to have his papers in order, a kind of confession of faith drawn up in conformity with that of the apostles at Jerusalem. Such trammels were an absolute obstacle to a fruitful apostleship; under such conditions Christianity would have never been preached. And, too, the emissaries of James were, to all appearance, much more active in sapping Paul's foundations than in constructing on their own account. The Churches of Bithynia, Pontus, and Cappadocia, which make their appearance about this time side by side with the Churches of Asia and Galatia, did not spring, it is true, from Paul; but it is improbable that they were on that account the work of James or Peter; doubtless they owed their existence to that anonymous preaching by the faithful, which was the most efficacious of all. On the other hand, we suppose that Batanæa, Haran, Decapolis, and, generally speaking, the whole region to the east of the Jordan, which was soon to be the centre and fortress of Judeo-Christianity, were evangelised by members of the Church of Jerusalem. The limits of the Roman power were very quickly found in this direction. The Arab countries in no way lent themselves to the new preaching, and the territories under the sway of the Arsacides were little open to efforts proceeding from the Roman dominions. In the geography of the apostles, the earth was a very small place. The first Christians never dreamed of a barbarian world or a Persian world; the Arab world itself scarcely existed for them. The missions of St Thomas among the Parthians, St Andrew among the Scythians, St Bartholomew in India, belong to legend. The Christian imagination of early times was little directed towards the East; the goal of apostolic peregrinations was the extreme West; in the East,



one might say, the missionaries considered the limits of their activity to be already reached.

Did Edessa hear the name of Jesus in the first century? Was there at this epoch a Syriac-speaking Christendom in the district of Osrhoene? The fables with which that Church surrounded its infancy do not permit one to speak with certainty on this point. It is very probable, however, that the intimate relations which Judaism had with this district were favourable to the propagation of Christianity. At an early date there were well-informed people in Samosata and Commagene who formed part of the Church, or were at least sympathetically inclined towards Jesus. In any case it was from Antioch that this Euphrates region received the seed of faith.

The clouds which were gathering over the East troubled the course of these peaceful missions. The good administration of Festus availed nothing against the evil which Judæa bore in her bosom. Brigands, Zelotes, hired assassins, and impostors of every kind infested the country. A magician appeared, after twenty others, who promised the people salvation and the end of their troubles if they would accompany him to the desert. Those who followed him were massacred by the Roman soldiers, but no one was disabused of false prophets. Festus died in Judæa about the beginning of the year 62, and Nero appointed as his successor Albinus. About the same time Herod Agrippa II. took the pontificate from Joseph Cabi to give it to Hanan, son of the notorious Hanan or Annas, who had, more than anyone else, contributed to bring about the death of Jesus. He was the fifth of the sons of Annas to acquire the dignity.

Hanan the younger was a haughty, harsh, and audacious man. He was the flower of the Sadducean body, the completest expression of that cruel and inhuman sect which was ever ready to make the exercise of authority insupportable and hateful. James, the brother of the Lord, was known throughout Jerusalem as a fierce defender of the poor, as a prophet of the ancient order, inveighing against

the rich and powerful. Hanan resolved on his death. Profiting by the absence of Agrippa, and the fact that Albinus had not yet arrived in Judæa, he assembled the juridical Sanhedrim, and made James and some other saints appear before him. They were accused of violating the Law and condemned to be stoned. Agrippa's authorization was necessary for assembling the Sanhedrim, and that of Albinus must have been legally required before proceeding to the punishment; but the violent Hanan ignored all rules. James was indeed stoned near the Temple. Just before the execution was finished, a fuller broke his head with the staff which he used for preparing cloth. James was said to be ninety-six years of age.

The death of this holy man had the worst possible effect in the city. The devout Pharisees, the strict observers of the Law, were greatly displeased. James was universally esteemed. He was held to be one of those men whose prayers had most efficacy. It is said that a Rechabite (probably an Essene) or, according to others, Simeon, son of Cleopas, nephew of James, cried out while he was being stoned: 'Hold! What are you doing? How can you slay this just man who prays for you?' To James was applied the passage in Isaiah (iii. 10) as it was then understood: "Let us put down," they say, "the just man," for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.' Hebrew elegies were made on his death full of allusions to biblical passages and his name of Obliam. Nearly everyone finally agreed to invite King Herod Agrippa II. to impose remits on the audacity of the High Priest. Albinus was informed of Hanan's outrage when he had already started for Judæa from Alexandria. He wrote a menacing letter, and then deprived him of his office. Hanan thus occupied the position of High Priest for only three months. The misfortunes which soon befell the nation were regarded by many persons as the consequence of James's murder. As for the Christians, they saw in his death a sign of the times, a proof that the final catastrophes were at hand.

Religious enthusiasm, in fact, reached strange proportions



at Jerusalem. Anarchy was at its height; the Zelotes, although decimated by persecutions, were masters of everything. Albinus in no way resembled Festus; he only dreamed of making money by his connivance with the brigands. On all sides portents of things unheard of were seen. It was at the end of the year 62 that a certain Jesus, son of Hanan, like a Jeremiah risen from the dead, began to wander day and night in the streets of Jerusalem, crying: 'Voice of the East! Voice of the West! Voice of the Four Winds! A Voice against Jerusalem and the Temple! A Voice against husbands and wives! A Voice against the whole people!' He was scourged, but he continued to repeat the same cry. He was beaten with rods until his bones were laid bare; at every blow he repeated in a voice of lamentation: 'Woe, woe upon Jerusalem!' He was never seen to speak to anyone. He went about ever repeating, 'Woe, woe upon Jerusalem!' without curses for those who beat him, or thanks for those who gave him alms. He continued thus until the siege, apparently without his voice ever becoming enfeebled.

If this Jesus, son of Hanan, was not a disciple of Jesus, his prophetic cry was at least the faithful expression of what lay in the depths of the Christian consciousness. Jerusalem had filled her cup to overflowing. This city which slew the prophets, stoned those sent to give her warning, scourged some, and crucified others, was henceforth to be the city of anathema. About the time we have now reached were formed the little apocalypses, attributed by some to Enoch, by others to Jesus, which exhibit the greatest resemblance to the cries of Jesus, son of Hanan. Later, these fragments found a place in the framework of the Synoptic Gospels, and were represented as discourses spoken by Jesus during his last days. Perhaps the command to quit Judæa and flee unto the mountains had already been given. At all events it is certain that on the Synoptic Gospels the sign of these agonies was deeply graven; they kept it as a birth mark, an indelible imprint. With the tranquil axioms of Jesus were mingled the colours

of a gloomy apocalypse, the presentiments of an apprehensive and troubled imagination. But the gentle spirit of the Christians sheltered them from the aberrations which agitated the other parts of the nation, possessed like them with Messianic ideas. For them the Messiah had come; he had sojourned in the wilderness; thirty years since he had ascended to heaven; the impostors or enthusiasts who sought to draw the people after them were false Christs and false prophets. And, moreover, the death of James, and perhaps of some other brethren, inclined them more and more to separate their cause from that of Judaism. A target for the hatred of all, they found solace in meditating on the precepts of Jesus. According to several, Jesus had predicted that, in the midst of all these trials, not a hair of their heads should perish.

The situation was so precarious, men felt so deeply that they were on the eve of a catastrophe, that no immediate successor to James in the headship of the Church of Jerusalem was appointed. The other 'brothers of the Lord,' such as Jude and Simeon, son of Cleopas, continued to be the chief authorities in the community. We shall see how, after the war, they served as a rallying point for all the faithful in Judæa. Jerusalem was to have but eight years more of life, and long before the fatal hour even, the eruption of the volcano was to scatter afar the little group of pious Jews, whom the memory of Jesus held in bonds of attachment.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LAST ACTIVITIES OF PAUL

PAUL, in the meantime, was suffering in prison the delays of an administration half disorganised by the extravagance of the sovereign and the evil-minded courtiers who surrounded him. Timothy, Luke, Aristarchus, and, according to certain traditions, Titus were with him. Tychicus had rejoined him once more. A certain Jesus, surnamed *Justus*, who was circumcised, a Demetrius or Demas, an uncircumcised proselyte who apparently belonged to Thessalonica, and a person of whom little is known, called Crescens, still had their places near his person, and served him as colleagues. Mark, who, according to our hypothesis, had come to Rome in the company of Peter, was apparently reconciled with the man whose earliest apostolic activity he had shared, and from whom he had violently separated himself; probably he served as an intermediary between Peter and the apostle of the Gentiles. In any case, Paul about this time was highly displeased with the Christians of the circumcision; he thought that they bore him little goodwill, and declared that he did not find amongst them good fellow-workers.

Important modifications, brought about perhaps by the new relationships which he formed in the capital of the Empire, the centre and confluence of all ideas, occurred about the time at which we have now arrived in Paul's manner of thinking, and render the writings of this period in his life perceptibly different from those composed by him during his second and third missions. The internal

development of the Christian doctrine was rapid in its working. During a few months of these fertile years, theology made more progress than it afterwards made in centuries. The new doctrine sought equilibrium, and on every side, so as to bear up its weaker parts, supplementary growths and supports came into being. It was like an animal in its formative stage, sprouting forth a limb, transforming an organ, casting off a superfluous appendage so as to arrive at the harmony of life, that is to say, at the state in which all the parts of a living organism respond to each other, give mutual assistance, and hold together.

The fire of a devouring activity had never up till now left Paul leisure to measure time, or to discover that Jesus was very long in reappearing on earth again; but these long months of prison life compelled him to introspection. Old age, too, began to come upon him; a kind of mournful maturity succeeded the ardours of his passion. Reflection made its way and forced him to give his ideas completeness and reduce them to theory. From the practical man that he had formerly been, he became a mystic, a theologian, a speculative philosopher. The impetuosity of a blind conviction, absolutely incapable of retreat, could not prevent him from being astonished sometimes that the heavens were not more speedy in opening, that the last trump did not sooner resound. Paul's faith was not shaken, but it required other means of support. His idea of Christ became modified. His dream henceforth was less of the Son of Man appearing on the clouds, presiding over the general resurrection, than of a Christ established in the deity, incorporated in him, acting in and with him. The resurrection for him was no longer in the future; it seemed to have already taken place. When one has once changed, one goes on changing afterwards; it is possible to be at once the most passionate and the most mobile of men. What is certain is, that the great conceptions of the final apocalypse and resurrection, which were once so familiar to Paul, which in one way or other appear on every page of the epistles of the second and third mission, even in the Epistle to the

Philippians, occupy a secondary place in the last writings of his captivity. In the latter they are replaced by a theory of Christ conceived as a sort of divine being, a theory very similar to that of the *Logos*, which was later to find its final form in the writings attributed to John.

The same change is to be remarked in the style. The language of the epistles of the captivity has more breadth, but it has lost a little of its force. The thought is wielded with less vigour. The wording differs notably from Paul's first vocabulary. The favourite terms of the Johannite school, 'light,' 'darkness,' 'life,' 'love,' etc., become dominant. The syncretistic philosophy of gnosticism already makes its presence felt. The question of justification by Jesus is no longer so urgent; the war of faith and works seems ended in the midst of the unity of the Christian life composed of knowledge and grace. Christ, who has become the central being of the universe, conciliates in his deified personality the antinomy of the two Christianities. Certainly, the suspicion with which the authenticity of such writings has been regarded is not altogether unjustified; but there are, nevertheless, such convincing proofs of it that we much prefer to attribute the differences of style and thought of which we have just spoken to a natural progress in Paul's manner. Earlier and unmistakably genuine writings of Paul's contain the germ of this new language. In them 'Christ' and 'God' are interchanged almost as though they were synonymous; Christ exercises divine functions, he is invoked as God, he is the necessary intermediary with God. The ardent attachment which was felt towards Jesus caused all the theories which had anywhere been in vogue in the Jewish world to be connected with him. Let us suppose that a man, responding to the somewhat diverse aspirations of democracy, should come to the front in our own days. His partisans would say to some, 'You are for organisation of labour; in him you see the embodiment of labour organisation.' To others, 'You are for independent morality; he is the living embodiment of independent morality.' To others, 'You are for co-operation; he is the living embodiment of



co-operation.' To others, 'You are for solidarity; he is the living embodiment of solidarity.'

Paul's new theory may be almost summed up as follows:—

This world is the dominion of darkness, that is to say, of Satan and his infernal hierarchy who fill the atmosphere. The reign of the saints, on the other hand, will be the reign of light. But the saints are what they are, not by their own merit—before Christ all were enemies of God—but by the application which God has made on them of the merits of Jesus Christ, the son of his love. It is the blood of this son shed upon the cross that effaces sins, reconciles every creature with God, and makes peace reign in heaven and on earth. The son is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of creation; all has been created in him, by him, and for him, things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible, thrones, powers, and supremacies. He was before all things, and all things exist in him. The Church and he form a single body of which he is the head. As in everything he has ever held the highest place, so will he hold it also in the resurrection. His resurrection is the beginning of the universal resurrection. The plenitude of divinity dwells corporeally in him. Jesus is thus man's deity, a kind of prime minister of creation placed between God and man. Everything asserted by monotheism of the relations of man with God can be asserted, according to the present theory of Paul, of the relations of man with Jesus. Veneration of Jesus, which with James does not exceed saint-adoration or worship such as that accorded to the Virgin Mary, with Paul really attains the proportions of worship of the supreme being, such as no Jew had, up till then, granted to the son of a woman.

This mystery, which God has been preparing from all eternity, he has revealed—the fulness of time being now come—to his saints of these latter days. The moment has arrived when each must complete his own part of the work of Christ. The work of Christ is completed by suffering, and suffering therefore is a prize in which we must glory and rejoice. The Christian, by his participation with Jesus, is

like him filled with the plenitude of divinity. By coming back to life Jesus has given new life to all with himself. He has caused the downfall of the dividing barrier between the people of God and the Gentiles; with the two portions of humanity reconciled, he has made a new humanity; all ancient hatreds he has slain upon the cross. The text of the Law was as the written acknowledgment of a debt of which humanity could not discharge itself; Jesus, by nailing it on his cross, has destroyed the value of the acknowledgment. The world created by Jesus is, then, an entirely new world; Jesus is the corner stone of the Temple which God has built for himself. The Christian lies dead in the earth, buried with Jesus in the tomb; his life is hidden in God with Christ. Whilst he waits for Christ to appear and make him take part in his glory, he mortifies his body, extinguishing all his natural desires, in all things taking a course contrary to that of nature, despoiling the 'old man,' clothing the 'new man' renewed in the image of his creator. From this point of view there is no longer either Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Barbarian or Scythian, slave or free man; Christ is all, Christ is in all. The saints are those to whom God by free gift has imputed the merits of Christ, and whom he thus predestined to divine adoption even before the world came into being. The Church is one, as God himself is one; its work is in the building up of the body of Christ; the final goal of all things is the realisation of the perfect man, the complete union of Christ with all his members, a state in which Christ will be in all truth the head of a humanity regenerated according to his own pattern, of a humanity receiving from him movement and life by a series of members in mutual bonds and dependent the one on the other. The dark powers of the air strive in mortal combat to prevent this consummation. Between them and the saints a terrible struggle will take place. It will be a day of horror; but, armed with the gifts of Christ, the saints will triumph.

Such doctrines were not entirely original. They were in



part those of the Jewish school in Egypt and more especially those of Philo. Christ, thus become a divine hypostasis, is the *Logos* of the Alexandrian Jewish philosophy, the *Memera* of the Chaldaic Paraphrases, the prototype of all things, by whom all has been created. These powers of the air to whom the empire of the world has been granted, these strange hierarchies, heavenly and infernal, are derived from those of gnosticism and the Jewish Cabala. This mysterious *pleroma*, the final goal of the work of Christ, strongly resembles the divine *pleroma* placed by gnosticism at the summit of the ladder of the universe. Gnostic and cabalistic theosophy, which may be regarded as the mythology of monotheism, and of which we believe the dawn may be noticed in Simon of Gitton, presents itself with its principal characteristics from the first century. To attribute systematically to the second century all documents in which traces of such a spirit are to be found, is very rash. The germ of the spirit was in Philo and in primitive Christianity. The theosophical conception of Christ was the necessary outcome of the Messianic conception of the Son of Man, when it became undeniably established, after a long period of expectancy, that the Son of Man was not coming again. In the most incontestably authentic epistles of Paul there are certain features which are little behind the exaggerations presented by the epistles written in prison. The Epistle to the Hebrews, dating from before the year 70, shows the same tendency to place Jesus in the world of metaphysical abstractions. All this will become obvious in the highest degree when we go on to speak of the Johannite writings. With Paul, who had not known Jesus, this metamorphosis in the conception of Christ was in some measure inevitable. While the school which possessed the living tradition of the Master created the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, the enthusiast, who had only in his dreams seen the founder of Christianity, transformed him more and more into a superhuman being, endowed with a kind of metaphysical vitality such as one might say no man has ever possessed.

This transformation, indeed, did not take place in Paul's ideas alone. The Churches he had brought into being progressed on the same lines. Those of Asia Minor, above all, were impelled, by a kind of secret force working within them, to adopt the most exaggerated ideas concerning the divinity of Jesus. That is easily to be understood. For the fraction of Christianity which had sprung from the familiar colloquies by the lake of Tiberias, Jesus necessarily remained the loving Son of God who had been seen passing about amongst men with his bearing full of charm and his gracious smile; but when Jesus was preached in some remote province of Phrygia, when the preacher declared that he had never seen him and almost affected to know nothing of his life on earth, what could these good and simple hearers think of him who was being preached to them? How could they picture him to themselves?—As a sage, as a master full of charm? It was by no means after this fashion that Paul expounded the function of Jesus. He ignored, or feigned to ignore, the Jesus of history. As the Messiah, as the Son of Man destined to appear in the clouds in the great day of the Lord? Such ideas were foreign to Gentiles and implied an acquaintance with Jewish literature. Obviously, the image which must have offered itself most frequently to these honest provincial folk was that of an incarnation, a God clad in human form and walking upon the earth. This was a very familiar idea in Asia Minor; Apollonius of Tyana was soon to exploit it for his own profit. To conciliate such a point of view with monotheism, a single step remained to be taken; to conceive of Jesus as a divine incarnate hypostasis, as a sort of double of the one God, taking human form for the accomplishment of a divine plan. It must be remembered that we are no longer in Syria. Christianity has passed from Semitic territory into the hands of races intoxicated with imagination and mythology. The prophet Mahomet, whose legend is among the Arabs so purely human, has in the same way become amongst the Shiites of Persia and India an entirely supernatural being, a kind of Vishnu or Buddha.

Some intercourse which the apostle had with his Churches in Asia Minor just about this time supplied him with an occasion for expounding the new form which he had grown accustomed to give his idea. The pious Epaphroditus or Epaphras, doctor and founder of the Church of Colossæ and head of the Churches on the banks of the Lycus, visited him on a mission from the Churches. Paul had never been in that valley, but in it his authority was admitted. He was even recognised as the apostle of the country, and everyone saw as he did in matters of faith. Learning of his captivity, the Churches of Colossæ, of Laodicæa on the Lycus, and of Hierapolis, deputed Epaphras to share his fetters, to console him, to assure him of the friendship of the faithful, and, probably, to offer him the pecuniary assistance of which he may have stood in need. The tidings which Epaphras brought to Paul of the zeal of the new converts filled Paul with satisfaction; their faith, charity, and hospitality were admirable. But Christianity took in the Phrygian Churches a singular course. Far from the direct contact of the great apostles, equally removed from all Jewish influence, these Churches, which were almost entirely composed of pagans, inclined to a sort of amalgam of Christianity, Greek philosophy, and local religions. In this peaceful little town of Colossæ, to the sound of waterfalls, in the midst of foaming torrents, with Hierapolis and its sun-illuminated mountain summit in view, faith in the full divinity of Jesus Christ waxed greater day by day. Let us remember that Phrygia was one of the lands which possessed most religious originality. Its mysteries contained, or were claimed to contain, a lofty symbolism. Several of the rites practised in the country were not without analogy to those of the new faith. For Christians lacking any previous tradition, who had not served the same apprenticeship in monotheism as the Jews, the temptation must have been strong to associate Christian dogma with ancient symbols, which, in this case, presented themselves as a heritage from the most honoured antiquity. These Christians had been devout pagans before adopting the ideas which came from Syria; it may be that, in adopting

the latter, they did not believe that they were formally breaking with their past. And, indeed, where is the truly religious man who utterly repudiates the traditional teaching under the shade of which he first felt the ideal, who does not seek, frequently in vain, to conciliate his old faith with that to which he has attained by the progress of his thought?

In the second century this necessity for syncretism acquired extreme importance, and brought about the full development of the gnostic sects. We shall see how, at the end of the first century, similar tendencies were to fill the Church of Ephesus with dissensions and agitation. Cerinthus and the author of the fourth Gospel proceed from an identical first principle, the idea that the consciousness of Jesus was a heavenly being distinct from his earthly form.

From the year 60, Colossæ was affected by the same evil. There a theosophy mingled with indigenous beliefs, Ebionite Judaism, philosophy, and elements borrowed from the new teaching, already found skilful interpreters. A worship of increate *Æons*, a highly-developed theory of angels and demons, in short, gnosticism with its arbitrary practices, its realised abstractions, began to grow up, and, by its deceptive charms, undermined the Christian faith in its most vital and essential parts. It mingled with it unnatural renunciations, a false taste for abasement, an ostentatious austerity which forbade the flesh its rights—in a word, all the aberrations of the moral sense destined to produce the Phrygian heresies of the second century (Montanism, Pepuzianism, Cataphrygianism), which were connected with the old mystical leaven of the Galli and Corybants, whose last survivors are the Dervishes of our own days. The difference between Christians of pagan origin and Christians of Jewish origin grew more marked day by day. Mythology and Christian metaphysics were born in the Churches of Paul. Belonging as they did to polytheistic races, the converted pagans found the idea of a God made man one of perfect simplicity, while to the Jews the incarnation of the deity was both blasphemous and revolting.

Paul, wishing to keep by him Epaphras, whose activity he

thought of utilising, resolved to reply to the Colossian deputation by sending them Tychicus of Ephesus, whom, at the same time, he entrusted with commissions for the Churches in Asia. Tychicus was to make a circuit in the valley of the Meander, to visit the communities, give them tidings of Paul, to communicate to them by word of mouth such details of the apostle's position with regard to the Roman authorities as he did not deem prudent to confide to writing, and, finally, to bestow on each of the Churches the separate letters which Paul had addressed to them. Those Churches which bordered on one another were recommended to communicate their letters reciprocally, and to read them by turns in their assemblies. Tychicus was also, perhaps, the bearer of a species of encyclical, modelled on the Epistle to the Colossians, and intended for the Churches to which Paul had nothing of a special nature to say. The apostle seems to have left to his disciples or secretaries the task of compiling this circular letter on the plan with which he supplied them, or after the example which he showed them.

The epistle addressed under these circumstances to the Colossians has been preserved for us. Paul dictated it to Timothy, signed it and added in his own writing: *Remember my bonds*. As to the circular epistle which Tychicus distributed during his journey to the Churches not addressed by name, it would seem that we possess it in the epistle 'to the Ephesians.' Certainly this epistle was not intended for the Ephesians, since in it the apostle addresses himself exclusively to converted pagans, to a Church which he has never seen, and to which he has no special counsel to give. The ancient manuscripts of the 'Epistle to the Ephesians' bear in white, in the superscription, the name of the Church addressed; the Vatican manuscript and the *Codex Sinaiticus* offer a like peculiarity. It has been conjectured that this alleged letter to the Ephesians is in reality the letter to the Laodicæans, which was written at the same time as that to the Colossians. We have elsewhere<sup>1</sup> set forth the reasons

<sup>1</sup> In *St Paul*.



which preclude us from admitting this theory, and incline us to see in the document in question a doctrinal letter of which Paul may have had several copies reproduced and distributed in Asia. Tychicus, when visiting his native Ephesus, may have shown one of these copies to the elders, and the latter may have kept it as an edifying work. It is perfectly admissible that this was the copy used when Paul's letters were collected together, whence would result the title now borne by the epistle. What is certain is, that the 'Epistle to the Ephesians' is scarcely more than a paraphrased imitation of the Epistle to the Colossians, with some additions derived from other epistles by Paul, and possibly from epistles that have been lost.

This 'Epistle to the Ephesians' forms, with the Epistle to the Colossians, the best account of Paul's theories towards the close of his career. The Epistle to the Colossians and the 'Epistle to the Ephesians' have, for the last period of the apostle's life, the same value as the Epistle to the Romans has for the epoch of his great apostleship. In them the ideas of the founder of Christian theology have reached their highest point of refinement. They bear the marks of that final spiritualisation to which great souls, near their end, subject their system of thought, and beyond which there is only death.

Certainly, Paul was right in fighting against this deadly disease of gnosticism, which was soon to menace seriously the human reason, that chimerical religion of angels, to which he opposes his Christ as being higher than all else, save God alone. We owe him renewed thanks for this, his last assault on circumcision, vain practices, and Jewish prejudices. The conclusion which he draws from his transcendent conceptions of Christ is in many respects admirable. But, good God, of what extravagances he is capable! What a contrast this audacious disdain of all reason, this brilliant eulogy of folly, this passion for paradox, present to that perfect wisdom which flees from all extremes! This 'old man,' whom Paul dismisses so cavalierly, is destined to turn the tables on him and demonstrate that

he did not merit such anathema. The classical antiquity thus unjustly condemned is one day to be the fountain head of 'Renaissance' for a world reduced by Christianity to the last stage of exhaustion. In this sense Paul is fated to be one of civilisation's most dangerous foes. Revivals of his spirit will be so many defeats for the human spirit. Paul will die on the day of the human spirit's final triumph. That which is the triumph of Jesus will be the death of Paul.

The apostle concludes his Epistle to the Colossians with the greetings and prayers of their saint and devoted catechist Epaphras, praying them at the same time to exchange letters with the Church of Laodicæa. With Tychicus, who was to be the bearer of the correspondence, he sent as messenger a certain Onesimus, whom he calls a 'faithful and beloved brother.' Nothing can be more touching than the story of this Onesimus. He had been the slave of Philemon, one of the chief men of the Church of Colossæ, and, after robbing his master, had fled to Rome, where he lay in hiding. There he became acquainted with Paul, perhaps through the medium of his compatriot Epaphras. Paul converted him, persuaded him to return to his master, and made him set out for Asia in the company of Tychicus. To calm any apprehensions which might still remain to poor Onesimus, Paul dictated to Timothy a letter for Philemon, a little masterpiece of epistolary art, which he placed in the delinquent's hands:—

PAUL, A PRISONER OF CHRIST JESUS, AND TIMOTHY OUR BROTHER,  
TO PHILEMON OUR BELOVED AND FELLOW-WORKER, AND TO  
APHIA OUR SISTER, AND TO ARCHIPPUS OUR FELLOW-SOLDIER,  
AND TO THE CHURCH IN THY HOUSE :

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always, making mention of thee in my prayers, hearing of thy love, and of the faith which thou hast towards the Lord Jesus, and towards all the saints ; that the fellowship of thy faith may become effectual, in the knowledge of every good thing which is in you, unto Christ. For I had much joy and comfort in thy love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through thee, brother.



Wherefore, though I have all boldness in Christ to enjoin thee that which is befitting, yet for love's sake I rather beseech, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now a prisoner also of Christ Jesus; I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus, who was aforetime unprofitable to thee, but now is profitable to thee and to me; whom I have sent back to thee in his own person, that is my very heart: whom I would fain have kept with me, that in thy behalf he might minister unto me in the bonds of the gospel; but without thy mind I would do nothing; that thy goodness should not be as of necessity, but of free will. For perhaps he was therefore parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest have him for ever; no longer as a servant, but more than a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much rather to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then thou countest me a partner, receive him as myself. But if he hath wronged thee at all, or oweth thee aught, put that to mine account.

Paul now took the pen and, to give his letter the value of genuine trustfulness, added these words—

*I Paul write it with mine own hand, I will repay it; that I say not unto thee how that thou owest to me even thine own self besides. Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my heart in Christ.*

Then he resumed his dictation:—

Having confidence in thine obedience I write unto thee, knowing that thou wilt do even beyond what I say. But withal prepare me also a lodging; for I hope that through your prayers I shall be granted unto you.

Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, saluteth thee; and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow-workers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

It is apparent that Paul had singular illusions. He believed himself to be on the eve of deliverance, he formed new plans for journeys, he saw himself in central Asia Minor in the midst of Churches which revered him as their apostle without having ever heard his voice. John-Mark was also preparing for a visit to Asia, no doubt on behalf of Peter. Already the Phrygian Churches had been informed of the approaching arrival of this brother. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul inserted a fresh recommendation about him. The tone of this recommendation is somewhat cold. Paul feared that the disagreements he had had with John-

Mark, and, still more, the latter's intimacy with the Hierosolymite party might give embarrassment to his friends in Asia, and that they might hesitate to receive a man whom, up till then, they had learned to distrust. Paul anticipated these misunderstandings, and commanded his Churches to share the sacraments with Mark if he should chance to visit their country. Mark was a cousin of Barnabas whose name, dear to the Galatians, cannot have been altogether unknown to the people of Phrygia. Of the sequel to these incidents nothing is known. A terrible earthquake occurred just then which devastated the whole valley of the Lycus. The wealthy town of Laodicæa was rebuilt from its citizens' own resources, but Colossæ could not rise again; it almost disappeared from the number of the Churches; the Apocalypse in 69 does not give it mention. Laodicæa and Hierapolis inherited all its importance in the history of Christianity.

In his apostolic activity Paul found consolation for the sorrows which assailed him on every side. He told himself that he was suffering for his dear Churches; he regarded himself as the victim who opened to the Gentiles the gates of the family of Israel. Towards the end of his captivity, however, he knew both discouragement and loneliness. Already, when writing to the Philippians, he had said, contrasting the conduct of his dear and faithful Timothy with that of some others: 'They all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ.'<sup>1</sup> Timothy alone seems never to have elicited any complaint from his master, severe, embittered, and difficult to please as the latter was. It is not admissible that Aristarchus, Epaphras and Jesus, surnamed *Justus*, could have abandoned him; but several of them might have happened to be absent at the same time. Titus was away on a mission; others who owed everything to him, notably people from Asia, among whom Phygellus and Hermogenus may be mentioned, ceased to frequent him. He, once surrounded by so many friends, saw himself left in solitude. The Christians

<sup>1</sup> Philippians ii. 21.

of the circumcision avoided him. At certain moments Luke alone was with him. His nature, which had always been a little morose, grew soured; it had now become almost impossible to live with him. Paul thus had a cruel experience of the ingratitude of men. Every word that he is reputed to have uttered about this period is full of dissatisfaction and bitterness. The Church of Rome, which was closely affiliated to that of Jerusalem, was for the most part Judeo-Christian. Orthodox Judaism, which was very strong at Rome, must have striven bitterly against him. The old apostle, his heart broken, prayed for death.

Were a man of other nature and of other race in question, we might try to picture Paul in these, his last days, as one at last recognising that he had spent his life for a fantasy, repudiating all the holy prophets for a work which, up to then, he had scarcely read, Ecclesiastes (a book full of charm, the only really lovable book ever written by a Jew) and avowing the truly happy man to be he who, after having lived his life joyfully until old age with the wife of his youth, dies without having lost his sons. A trait characteristic of great men of European birth is, at certain times, to justify Epicurus, to be seized with nausea in the midst of arduous labour, and, after succeeding in their efforts, to begin to wonder whether, after all, the cause they have served has been worth so many sacrifices. There are many who dare to confess inwardly, even in the heat of action, that the day when a man begins to be wise is that on which, freed from all cares, he contemplates nature and enjoys life. Very few at least escape tardy regrets. There is scarce a person of devout life, whether priest or nun, who at the age of fifty does not bewail the plighted vow, and yet fails to keep it. We do not understand the honest man who has not a touch of scepticism; we like the virtuous man to say from time to time: 'Virtue, thou art but a name'; for he who is too certain that virtue will be rewarded has not much merit; his good deeds seem no more than an advantageous in-

vestment. Jesus was no stranger to fine feeling of this kind; more than once the divine part he had to play apparently weighed him down. Certainly it was not so for St. Paul; he did not have his Gethsemane agony, and that is one of the reasons why he is less lovable in our sight. Whilst Jesus possessed in the highest degree what we regard as the essential quality of a man of distinction, I mean the gift of being able to smile at his work, of being superior to it, of not allowing it mastery over him, Paul was not free from the defect which shocks us in sectaries; he believed blindly. We could wish that at moments he had, like ourselves, wearily sat down by the wayside and perceived the vanity of fixed beliefs. Marcus Aurelius, the most glorious representative of our race, cedes to none in virtue, and yet he was incapable of fanaticism. Such natures are unknown in the East; our race alone has the power of realising virtue without faith, of uniting doubt with hope. Given over to the terrible enthusiasm of their temperament, exempt from the refined vices of Greek and Roman civilisation, these strong Jewish souls were like powerful springs for ever unrelaxed. There can be no doubt that to the very end Paul saw before him the imperishable crown prepared for him, and, like a runner, redoubled his efforts the more closely he approached the goal. He had, indeed, his moments of consolation. Onesiphorus of Ephesus, having come to Rome, sought him out, and, unashamed of his chain, ministered to him and refreshed his soul. Demas, on the contrary, took a dislike to the apostle's absolute doctrines and left him. Paul appears to have always treated him with a certain coldness.

Did Paul appear before Nero, or, rather, before the council to the jurisdiction of which his appeal was remitted? It is almost certain that he did. Some accounts, of doubtful value it is true, speak of a 'first defence' in which no one took his part, and whence, strong with the grace which supported him, he emerged so successfully that he compared himself to a man delivered from the lion's

mouth. Very probably his case ended after two years' imprisonment at Rome (in the beginning of the year 63) by an acquittal. It is hard to see what motive the Roman authorities could have had in condemning him for a sectarian quarrel which had but slight interest for them. Weighty evidence, besides, proves that Paul, before his death, carried out yet another series of apostolic journeys and missions, but not in the countries of Greece and Asia which he had already evangelised.

Five years previously, a few months before his arrest, Paul, writing from Corinth to the faithful at Rome, had announced his intention of going to Spain. He did not wish, he said, to carry on his ministry amongst them; it was only in passing that he looked forward to seeing them and enjoying a short time in their company; they would then see him off and assist him on his journey to the 'lands beyond. The apostle's sojourn at Rome was thus subordinated to a distant mission, which was apparently his chief aim. During his imprisonment at Rome, Paul seems at times to have changed his mind with regard to his travels in the West. To the Philippians and to Philemon of Colossæ, he expresses the hope of coming to see them; but surely he did not carry out this design. On his release from prison, what did he do? It is natural to suppose that he followed his first intention, and set out as soon as he could. There is material reason to believe that he carried out his project of a journey to Spain. This journey possessed in his mind a high-doctrinal significance, and he attached much importance to it. It was a matter of being able to say that the good tidings had been carried to the extreme limits of the West, of proving that the Gospel was fulfilled, since it had been heard at the ends of the earth. This manner of slightly exaggerating the extent of his journeys was habitual with Paul. The general idea of the faithful was, that before the coming of Christ the kingdom of God must be preached everywhere. According to the apostle's manner of speech it

sufficed that it should have been preached in a city for it to have been preached in a country, and that it should have been preached to ten persons for all the town to have heard it.

If Paul made this journey, he probably travelled by sea. It is not absolutely impossible that some seaport town in southern Gaul may have received the footprint of the apostle. In any case no appreciable result remained of this problematical journey to the West.



## CHAPTER V

### THE APPROACH OF THE CRISIS

AT the close of Paul's captivity both the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles alike fail us. We meet with a profound obscurity which is in singular contrast with the historical clarity of the ten preceding years. It is no doubt in order to avoid relating events in which the Roman authorities played an odious part that the author of the Acts, who always shows respect for that authority and a desire to prove that it has been in many cases favourable to the Christians, stops abruptly at this point. This fatal silence leaves us in great uncertainty on events about which we should like to know much. Happily, Tacitus and the Apocalypse come to our aid by casting a vivid gleam of light over this great darkness. The moment had come for Christianity, up till now held in secret by humble folk who to it owed their joy, to blaze forth in history with a thunder peal the reverberations of which were to echo for long.

We have seen that the apostles spared no effort to inculcate moderation in brethren exasperated by the iniquities of which they were the victims. They were not always successful. Different condemnations had been passed on Christians, and it had been possible to represent these sentences as being repressions of crimes or misdemeanours. With an admirably logical sense the apostles drew up the code of martyrdom. If a man be condemned because he bears the name of 'Christian,' he must rejoice. It was believed that Jesus had once said, 'Ye shall be

hated of all men for my sake.'<sup>1</sup> But to have the right to be proud of this hatred one must be irreproachable. It was in part to calm inopportune effervescences, to prevent acts of insubordination towards public authority, and also to establish firmly his right to address all the Churches, that Peter, about this time, believed he ought to follow Paul's example and write to the Churches of Asia Minor, without distinction of Jews or converted pagans, a circular letter or doctrinal treatise. Epistles were in fashion; from simple correspondence the epistle had become a literary form, an imaginary frame-work, which served as a setting for little religious treatises. We have seen how St. Paul at the end of his life adopted this custom. Each of the apostles, influenced a little by his example, wished to have his own epistle to serve as a specimen of his literary style and manner of teaching, and to contain his favourite maxims. And, if an apostle did not have an epistle, one was fathered on him. These new epistles, which later were called 'Catholic,' did not necessarily imply that the author had something which he wished to communicate to somebody; they were the personal thesis of the apostle, his sermon, his leading principles of thought, his little theological system in eight or ten pages. In them he incorporated fragments of phrases drawn from the common homiletical store which, by frequency of quotation, had lost all sign of individual authorship, and belonged to no writer in particular.

Mark had returned from the journey to Asia Minor, which he had undertaken at the command of Peter and with the recommendations of Paul, a journey which perhaps had been the sign of the two apostles' reconciliation. This journey had put Peter in touch with the Churches of Asia, and justified him in sending them a letter of doctrinal instruction. Mark, as it was his habit, acted as Peter's secretary and interpreter in the composition of the epistle. It is doubtful whether Peter could speak or write Greek and Latin; his own language was Syriac. Mark was at the

<sup>1</sup> Matthew x. 22.

same moment connected with both Peter and Paul; and in that circumstance perhaps we may find the explanation of a singular feature in the Epistle of Peter, I mean the borrowings made by the author of that epistle from the writings of St. Paul. It is certain that Peter or his secretary (or the forger who usurped his name) had before him the Epistle to the Romans and the so-called Epistle to the Ephesians, precisely those two of Paul's epistles which were 'Catholic,' true general treatises, and of universal circulation. It is quite possible that the Church of Rome possessed a copy of the 'Epistle to the Ephesians,' which was of recent date, and a kind of general formulary of Paul's faith in its latest phase of development, addressed in the form of a circular letter to several Churches; it is more probable still that it possessed the Epistle to the Romans. There cannot have been copies of Paul's other writings, which are much more of the nature of private letters, at Rome. Some passages, of a less characteristic kind, in the Epistle of Peter, appear to have been borrowed from James. Can Peter, whom we have always found occupying a floating position in apostolic controversies, have wished, by making James and Paul speak, if one may so express it, by the same mouth, to demonstrate that the contradictions between these two apostles were only apparent? As a token of this conciliation, did he desire to act as the exponent of Pauline ideas, modified, it is true, and shorn of their essential and crowning principle, justification by faith? It is more probable that Peter, little versed in composition, and not concealing from himself his literary sterility, did not hesitate to appropriate the pious phrases in constant repetition around him, which, although derived from different systems, did not formally contradict one another. Peter seems, happily for himself, to have remained all his life a theologian of very moderate ability; it is useless to seek in his work for the rigour of a logical system.

The difference in the points of view habitually taken by Peter and Paul respectively is betrayed, indeed, by the first

line of the composition under consideration: 'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, etc.' Such expressions are of an entirely Jewish cast. The children of Israel, according to the ideas held in Palestine, were comprised under two headings: those who lived in the Holy Land, and those residing elsewhere who were grouped under the general name of the 'Dispersion.' But for Peter and James the Christians, even if pagan by birth, are so entirely a portion of the People of Israel, that the whole Christian Church outside Jerusalem is, in their eyes, included in the category of banishment. Jerusalem is still the one spot on earth where, according to them, a Christian is not an exile.

The Epistle of Peter, in spite of its faulty style, which has much more resemblance to that of Paul than to that of James and Jude, is a touching fragment, in which the condition of the Christian consciousness towards the close of Nero's reign is admirably reflected. It breathes a sweet and pensive melancholy, a resigned confidence. Supreme moments were at hand. They had to be preceded by times of trial, whence the elect were to come forth refined as with fire. Jesus, whom the faithful loved without having ever beheld, in whom they believed without seeing, was soon to appear and fill them with joy. Foreordained of God from all eternity, announced by the prophets, the mystery of redemption had been fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The elect, called to be born again in the blood of Jesus, were a people of saints, a royal priesthood offering up spiritual victims.

Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your behaviour seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well. For so is the will of God, that by well-doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wicked-

ness, but as bondservants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

Servants, be in subjection to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is acceptable, if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.<sup>1</sup>

The ideal of the Passion, that touching picture of Jesus suffering in silence, was already, one can easily see, exercising a decisive influence on the Christian mind. It may be doubted whether the narrative was already written, for it acquired day by day more wealth of circumstantial detail; but the essential features were firmly established in the memory of the faithful, and served them as perpetual exhortations to patience. One of the principal Christian tenets was, that it behoved the Messiah to suffer. More and more Jesus or the true Christian were pictured in imagination under the form of a patient lamb in the hands of the butcher. In spirit men embraced this gentle lamb, slain while still young by wicked men, and exceeded the loving compassion, the tender affection of a Mary Magdalene by the tomb. The innocent victim, with the knife plunged in his open wound, drew tears from all who had known him. The expression 'Lamb of God,' to designate Jesus, was already formed, and with it was mingled the idea of the paschal lamb. One of the most essential principles of Christian art had its germ in these figures. A vision such as this, which strongly impressed Francis of Assisi and brought tears to his eyes, was called up by the fine passage in which the second Isaiah, describing the ideal of the Prophet of Israel (the man of sorrows), pictures him as a sheep that is led to the slaughter and before her shearers is dumb.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter ii. 11-23.



This example of submission and humility, Peter made the law for all classes of Christian society. The elders were to govern their flock with respectful regard, avoiding all airs of authority; the young were to be submissive to the elders; women, above all, without attempting to be preachers, were, by the modest charm of their piety, to be the great missionaries of the faith.

In like manner, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behaviour of their wives; beholding your chaste behaviour coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner aforetime the holy women also, who hoped in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose children ye now are, if ye do well, and are not put in fear by any terror.

Ye husbands, in like manner, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour unto the woman, as unto the weaker vessel, as being also joint-heirs of the grace of life; to the end that your prayers be not hindered.

Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humbleminded: not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing. . . . And who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good? But, and if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye!<sup>1</sup>

The hopes which the Christian avowed for the coming of the Kingdom of God gave rise to misunderstandings. The pagans imagined that they spoke of a political revolution on the eve of being accomplished.

Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that wherein ye are spoken against, they may be put to shame who revile your good manner of life in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God should so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing. . . . The time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles, and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, wine-bibbings, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange

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<sup>1</sup> I Peter iii. 1-9, 13-14.



that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you : who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. . . . But the end of all things is at hand. . . . Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you : but insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice ; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy. If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are ye. . . . For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters : but if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name. For the time is come for judgement to begin at the house of God : and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God ? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear ? Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator. . . . Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. . . . Be sober, be watchful : your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour : whom withstand steadfast in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world. And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

If this epistle, as we willingly grant, is really to be attributed to Peter, it does his good sense, his uprightness, and his simplicity much credit. He arrogates to himself no authority ; in addressing the elders, he speaks as one of themselves. He only puts himself forward because he has been an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ, and because he hopes to participate in the glory which is soon to be revealed. The letter was carried to Asia by a certain Silvanus, who cannot have been other than the Silvanus or Silas who was a companion of Paul. Peter would naturally choose him, as being already known to the faithful in Asia Minor, by reason of the journey which he had made amongst them in Paul's company. Peter sends the salutations of Mark to these distant Churches in a manner that also implies that the latter was not unknown to them. The letter ends with the usual greetings. The Church of Rome is designated as 'she that is in Babylon, elect together with you.' The sect was already

<sup>1</sup> I Peter iii. 15-17 ; iv. 3-5, 7, 12-14, 15-19 ; v. 6, 8-11.

closely watched ; if a too clearly expressed letter were intercepted, frightful misfortunes might ensue. In order to avert the suspicions of the police, Peter chose, for his references to Rome, the name of an ancient capital of Asiatic impiety, a name the symbolical significance of which escaped no one, and which was soon to furnish the fundamental element of an entire poem.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BURNING OF ROME

THE maniac fury of Nero had reached its paroxysm. It was the most terrible crisis of peril that the world had ever experienced. Time's absolute necessity had delivered over everything into the hands of a single man, the inheritor of the great legendary name of Cæsar. No other *régime* was possible, and usually the provinces fared sufficiently well under its sway; but it concealed an immense danger. When the Cæsar was deranged in mind, when all the arteries of his poor head, troubled by some strange power, burst simultaneously, then were there delirious follies without name. Men were in the hands of a monster, whom there was no means of hunting from power; his body-guard, composed of Teutons who had all to lose if he fell, were like furies standing around him; the savage beast at bay in its lair defended himself with frenzied rage. In Nero there was something at once terrifying and grotesque, grandiose and absurd. As the Cæsar had a strong liking for letters, his madness mainly took a literary form. The fantasies of all centuries, of all poems, of all legends, Bacchus and Sardanapalus, Ninus and Priam, Troy and Babylon, Homer and the insipid verse of his own day, were jostled chaotically together in his brain, the feeble brain of a mediocre but self-sufficient artist, to whom chance had granted the power to realise all his wildest dreams. Imagine a man with almost as much intelligence as one of the heroes of M. Victor Hugo, a Shrove Tuesday merryandrew, a mixture of lunatic, lackey, and actor, invested with universal

power, and charged with the task of governing the world. He had not the black wickedness of Domitian, love of evil for the sake of evil; nor was he an extravagant prodigal of Caligula's type; he was a conscientious romanticist, an emperor of comic opera, a melomaniac trembling for the applause of the gallery and making the gallery tremble. He resembled what a modern tradesman of the middle class would be, whose good sense was perverted by reading modern poets, and who deemed it necessary to make his conduct resemble that of Hans of Iceland or the Burgraves. Government being the practical art *par excellence*, romanticism is totally out of place in it. Romanticism is in its proper sphere in the domain of art; but action is the antithesis of art. In all that touches the education of a prince is romanticism more especially fatal. In this respect Seneca injured his pupil by his bad literary taste more than benefited him by his fine philosophy. He was a man of great intellectual ability, of distinguished talent, and albeit his character was not unstained, has, at bottom, claims to our respect; but he was quite spoiled by rhetoric and literary vanity, and incapable of feeling and reasoning without phrases. By force of exercising his pupil in the expression of things which he did not think, of preparing sublime sayings in advance, he made of him a jealous comedian, a paltry rhetorician, talking in high-sounding terms about humanity when he was sure of being overheard. The old pedagogue saw deeply into the evil of his age, that of his pupil and his own, when, in a moment of sincerity, he wrote: *Literarum intemperantia laboramus*.

These absurdities, as at first displayed by Nero, were sufficiently inoffensive; for a time the ape kept watch on himself and persevered in the postures which had been taught him. Cruelty only showed itself in him after the death of Agrippina; but it then entirely mastered him, and that very quickly. Each year is now marked by its crimes: Burrus is no more, and everyone believes that Nero has slain him; Octavius has left the country overwhelmed with shame; Seneca is in retirement, expecting every hour to

bring his arrest, dreading of naught save tortures, hardening his soul to think of punishments, striving to prove that death is a deliverance. With Tigellinus master of everything, the saturnalia is complete. Every day Nero declares that art alone must be taken seriously, that all virtue is a lie, that the 'gallant man' is he who is frank and avows his complete shamelessness, that the 'great man' is he who knows how to abuse all, lose all, and spend all. A virtuous man is to him a hypocrite, a rebel, a dangerous character, and, above all, a rival. Whenever he discovers some horrible piece of baseness, which seems to lend support to his theories, he is transported with delight. The political perils of bombast and of that false spirit of emulation which from the beginning have been the cankerworm at the root of Roman culture, are unveiled. The mountebank has been able to acquire the right of life and death over his audience, the *dilettante* menaces people with torture if they fail to admire his verses. A monomaniac, intoxicated with literary vainglory, who turns the fine maxims he has been taught into pleasantries worthy of a cannibal, a malicious urchin posing for the applause of street corner loafers—such is the master to whom the Empire owes submission. Never before had such extravagance been known. The despots of the East, terrible and grave, had not these bursts of insane glee, these debauches of perverse æstheticism. Caligula's madness had been short-lived; it was a mere passing attack, and then Caligula was essentially a buffoon. He really had some wit; but Nero's insanity, on the contrary, while usually merely silly, was at times terribly tragic. What was most horrible, was to see him in his rhetorical fashion, play with remorse, and make it the material for verse. With that melodramatic air of which none but he was capable, he described himself as being tormented by the Furies, and quoted Greek verses on parricides. It was as though some mocking god had created him in order to enjoy the horrible uproar of a human nature in which all the mechanism grated discordantly, the obscene spectacle of an epileptic world like

a dance of Congo apes, or the blood-stained orgy of some king of Dahomey.

At his example, the whole populace seemed possessed with frenzy. There had been formed a band of objectionable rakehells called the 'Knights of Augustus,' whose occupation it was to applaud the follies of the Cæsar and invent, for his amusement, farces worthy of nocturnal cut-throats. From this school we are about to see an Emperor come forth. A deluge of imaginative productions in bad taste, platitudes, would-be witticisms and nauseous slang, which resembled the spirit of our gutter journals, swept down upon Rome and set the fashion. Caligula had already shown the fatal example of an imperial comedian. Nero unblushingly took him as his model. It was not enough for him to drive chariots in the circus, to bawl himself hoarse in public, to tour the provinces as a singer; he was seen fishing with golden nets which he drew with purple cords, personally arranging for his hired applause, leading sham triumphs, awarding to himself all the crowns of Greek antiquity, organising unheard-of festivities, playing on the stage nameless parts.

The cause of all these aberrations was the bad taste of the age, and the exaggerated importance accorded to an elocutionary art which aimed at enormities, and dreamed only of what was monstrous. The ruling fashion in all things was a lack of sincerity, an insipid unreality like that of Seneca's tragedies, skill in depicting feelings that were not felt, the art of speaking as an honest man without being one. The gigantic passed for being great, æsthetic theory was hopelessly depraved; it was the period of colossal statuary, of that materialistic and theatrical art with its counterfeit pathos, of which the 'Laocoön' is the masterpiece—certainly an admirable statue, but one in which the pose too strongly suggests that of a leading tenor rendering his *aria*, and in which all the emotion is derived from physical suffering. The wholly moral pain expressed in the Niobides, transfused with beauty, no longer sufficed; popular taste demanded the representation of physical torment, and delighted in it



as did the eighteenth century in a marble of Puget's. The senses were worn out; coarse effects, such as the Greeks scarce permitted themselves in their most popular representations, became the essential element in art. The populace was literally mad with desire for spectacular entertainments—not serious spectacles, purifying tragedies and the like, but sensational pieces and phantasmagoria. An ignoble taste for 'living pictures' was widely spread. Men no longer were content to enjoy in imagination the exquisite creations of the poets; they wished to behold the myths represented in the flesh, so far as all that was most bloodthirsty or most obscene was concerned; they were in raptures before the grouping and attitudes of the actors, and sought in them for statuesque effects. The applause of fifty thousand persons assembled in a vast amphitheatre, stirring each other to enthusiasm, was a thing so intoxicating that the sovereign himself came to envy the chariot-driver, the singer, the actor; theatrical glory passed for being the greatest of all. Not one of the Emperors, if he had a weak place in his intellect, could resist the temptation of gaining crowns for these sorry sports. In their pursuit, Caligula lost what small portion of intellect he possessed; he passed his days at the theatre, amusing himself in the company of other idlers; later, Commodus and Caracalla were in this matter to dispute the palm for folly with Nero. It was found necessary to pass laws forbidding senators and knights to descend into the arena, to strive as gladiators, or fight with wild beasts. The circus had become the centre of life; the rest of the world seemed only made for ministering to the pleasures of Rome. New inventions, one more strange than the other, were constantly being conceived and ordered by the theatrical manager on the throne. The people went from amusement to amusement, speaking only of yesterday's show and looking forward to what was promised them on the morrow, and ended by being deeply attached to the prince who thus made life an endless revel. There can be no doubt of the popularity which Nero won by these shameless expedients; after his death Otho was able to

secure the imperial power simply by extolling his memory, imitating him, and reminding the populace that he himself had been one of the favourites of his circle.

It cannot be truthfully said that the wretched man was lacking in heart, or in all feeling for the good and the beautiful. Far from being incapable of friendship, he frequently showed himself to be a good comrade, and it was precisely this which made him cruel; he desired love and admiration, and was angry with those who did not show such feelings towards him. His nature was jealous and susceptible, and little treasons incensed him beyond measure. Nearly all his deeds of vengeance were wreaked on persons, such as Lucan and Vestinus, who, after having been admitted into his circle of intimate friends, abused the familiarity which he encouraged to make him the butt of their raillery; for he was conscious of his own absurdities, and feared for their being noticed. The principal reason for his hatred against Thræsea was, that he despaired of winning his affection. The grotesque quotation of the bad hemistich,

*Sub terris tonuisse putes,*

was the ruin of Lucan. Without ever denying himself the services of a Galvia Crispinilla, he had a genuine affection for some women, and these women, Poppæa and Acte, loved him. After the death of Poppæa, caused by his own brutality, he was affected with an almost touching repentance; was for a long time under the sway of tender feeling, sought for everything that resembled her, and with insensate eagerness attempted to find substitutes. Poppæa, for her part, had for him feelings which a woman of such distinction would not have avowed for a vulgar man. A courtesan of the most aristocratic circles, skilled in setting off by the refinements of a studied modesty the attractions of her matchless beauty and supreme elegance, Poppæa, despite her crimes, retained in her heart an instinctive religious feeling, which had some tendency towards Judaism. Nero seems to have been highly sensitive to that charm in women, which results from

the union of coquetry with a certain piety. The alternations of self-abandonment and pride in this woman, who never ventured abroad without her face being partly veiled, her flow of amiable converse, and, above all, her touching worship of her own loveliness, which once caused her, a mirror having revealed some blemishes, a characteristically feminine outburst of despair and desire for death,—all this vividly impressed the imagination of a youthful debauchee, over whom the semblances of modesty exercised an all-powerful fascination. We are soon to see how Nero, in his rôle of Antichrist, was in a sense to create the new æsthetics, and be the first to feast his eyes with the spectacle of Christian chastity unveiled. The devout and voluptuous Poppæa kept him under the sway of similar sentiments. The conjugal reproach, which brought about her death, implies that in her most familiar relations with Nero, she never abandoned the haughtiness which she affected at the beginning of their intercourse. As to Acte, even if she were not a Christian as has been supposed, she was not far from being one. She was a slave who originally came from Asia, that is to say, from a region with which the Roman Christians had constant intercourse. It was frequently remarked that the beautiful freed women who had most adorers, were strongly inclined to Oriental religions. Acte always retained simple tastes, and never completely severed herself from the little world of slaves from which she had emerged. She at first belonged to the Annæa family, around which, as we have seen, the Christians used to group themselves in their various activities; it was at the instigation of Seneca that she played, under the most monstrous and tragic of circumstances, a part which, considering her servile condition, cannot be called seemly. This poor, humble, gentle girl, whom several monuments show us surrounded by a family of people bearing names that are almost Christian (Claudia, Felicula, Stephanus, Crescens, Phœbe, Onesimus, Thallus, Artemas, Helpis), was the first love of Nero's youth. She was faithful to him unto death; we shall find her once more at the villa of Phaon, piously

rendering the last services to the corpse from which the whole world recoiled with horror.

And it must be said in truth, that, singular as it may appear, it is conceivable that, in spite of everything, women may have loved him. He was a monster, an absurd creature, ill made, one of nature's incongruous productions ; but he was not a vulgar monster. One might have imagined that fate, by some strange caprice, had wished to realise the fabulous monster of the logicians, a being hybrid, grotesque, incoherent, for the most part detestable, from whom, nevertheless, it was impossible at times to withhold one's pity. Since women's feelings are more dependent on sympathy and personal taste than on the rigorous appreciation of ethics, a little beauty or moral goodness, even if simulated in the extreme, suffices to extinguish their indignation in pity. They are, above all, indulgent towards the artist crazed with the intoxication of his art, towards a Byron, the victim of his own fantasy, going so far in his naïvety as to translate into action his inoffensive poetic sentiments. On the day on which Acte placed the gory corpse of Nero in the sepulchre of the Domitians, she wept, no doubt, over the profanation of natural gifts known to herself alone ; and on that same day, one can believe, more than one Christian woman prayed for him.

Although of only moderate talent, he was something of an artist ; he painted well, and had some skill as a sculptor ; his verses were good, notwithstanding a certain schoolboy emphasis, and, in spite of all that could be said to the contrary, he wrote them himself ; Suetonius saw his autograph rough drafts covered with erasures. He was the first to appreciate the exquisite landscape at Subiaco, and there he had a delightful summer residence built for himself. His judgment in the observation of natural phenomena was correct, and he showed a desire for knowledge ; he had a taste for experiments, new inventions, and ingenious contrivances ; he wished to understand the reasons of things, and perceived very clearly the trickery of the alleged sciences of magic, as well as the hollowness of all the religions of his

time. The biographer from whom we have just quoted, has handed down to us an account of the manner in which his vocation as a singer awoke in him. He owed his initiation to Terpnos, the most renowned harp-player of the age. He was seen passing whole nights seated beside the musician, studying his technique, lost in what he was hearing, entranced, absorbed, intoxicated, eagerly breathing the air of another world which opened out before him at the touch of a great artist. Herein, too, was the source of his dislike to the Romans, who, for the most part, had little æsthetic taste, and his preference for the Greeks, who, in his opinion, were alone capable of appreciating him, and for Orientals who were accustomed to applaud him vociferously. From this moment he admitted no glory save that of art; a new life was revealed to him; the Emperor was forgotten by himself; to deny his artistic talent was high treason; and the enemies of Rome were those who failed to admire him.

His affectation for being in everything the leader of fashion was assuredly ridiculous; though it must be admitted that there was more policy in this than might be imagined. The Cæsar's first duty, owing to the degeneracy of the age, was to keep the populace amused. The sovereign was, before all else, a great organiser of entertainments; as chief manager of such amusements, he was necessarily obliged to take his personal part in them. Many of the enormities with which Nero was reproached were only serious from the point of view of Roman manners, and the austere deportment which, up till then, had been customary. A virile society, like that of Rome, was disgusted to behold the Emperor giving audience to the Senate in an embroidered dressing gown, and could not endure the sight of him reviewing his troops, in careless dishabille, wearing no belt, and with a kind of silken handkerchief about his neck to preserve his voice. True Romans were rightly indignant at the introduction of Eastern habits. But it was inevitable, that the oldest and most exhausted civilisation should enslave the youngest with its corruption. Already Cleopatra and Antony had dreamed of an Oriental



empire. Such a realm was suggested to Nero himself; as a last resource, in case of need, he was to dream of asking to be appointed governor of Egypt. From Augustus to Constantine, every year represents a forward step in the conquest of the Latin-speaking portion of the Empire by the part which spoke Greek.

It must also be remembered that madness was in the air. If the excellent nucleus of an aristocracy which was to come into power with Nerva and Trajan be left out of account, it may be said that there was a general lack of seriousness, which caused the most important men in some measure to play at living. The individual who represented the age and served as its incarnation, the 'honest man' of this reign of transcendent immorality, was Petronius. He devoted the day to sleep, the night to business and amusements. He was not of those prodigals who ruin themselves in coarse debauchery; he was a voluptuary deeply learned in the science of pleasure. His natural ease and lack of constraint in speech and action gave him an air of simplicity which had much charm. As pro-consul, and afterwards as consul in Bithynia, he showed his competence to direct the most important affairs of state. On his return to vice, or its formal display, he was admitted to Nero's intimate circle, and in everything became the arbiter of good taste. Nothing was correct or delightful had Petronius not approved of it. The ruffianly Tigellinus, who ruled by his baseness and wickedness, feared a rival who surpassed him in the science of pleasure, and succeeded in ruining him. Petronius had too much self-respect to struggle against this miserable wretch. He had no wish, however, to quit life too hastily. After having opened his veins, he had them closed again; then he opened them anew, conversing the while with his friends whom he heard speaking, not of the immortality of the soul and the views of philosophers, but of songs and society verse. He chose this moment to reward some of his slaves and have others punished. Sitting down at table he fell asleep. This sceptic of the Mérimée type, with his dispassionate and exquisite tone,



has left us a romance characterised by an animation, a subtle perfection, as well as a refined corruption, which make it the perfect mirror of Nero's age. After all, it is no such easy matter to be the leader of fashion. Beneath science and morality there is a technical art of living with elegance. The banquet of the universe would lack something were the world peopled by none save iconoclastic fanatics and virtuous dullards.

It cannot be denied that taste for art was, in the men of that period, enthusiastic and sincere. The making of beautiful things had almost ceased; but the beautiful things of the past were eagerly sought for. This same Petronius, an hour before his death, had his murrhine vase broken, so that Nero might not get possession of it. Art treasures reached fabulous prices. Nero had a passionate fondness for them. Possessed with the idea of grandeur, but combining with it as little good sense as was possible, he dreamed of fantastic palaces, and cities like Babylon, Thebes, and Memphis. The imperial abode on the Palatine Hill (the former residence of Tiberius) had been comparatively modest in extent and essentially private in character until the reign of Caligula. The latter, who, on the whole, must be regarded as the founder of the school of government in which, it is too readily taken for granted, Nero had no master, considerably enlarged the house of Tiberius. Nero affected to find it too scanty for him, and could not find terms to express his derision for his predecessors who had been contented with so little. He had a residence constructed of temporary materials, which vied with the palaces of China and Assyria. This palace, which he called 'transitory,' and intended soon to make permanent, formed a whole world in itself. With its colonnades three miles in length, its parks in which flocks of sheep stood grazing, its inner solitudes, its lakes surrounded with perspective scenes of fantastic cities, its vineyards, and its forests, it covered a greater area than the Louvre, the Tuilleries, and the Champs Elysées combined, extending as it did from the Palatine Hill to the Gardens of Mæcenas on the heights

of the Esquiline. It was a true fairyland in which Severus and Celer the engineers had surpassed themselves. Nero wished the palace to be constructed in such a way that it might be called 'the House of Gold.' He found a charm in hearing proposals for mad enterprises which would make his memory flourish eternally. But it was Rome, above all, that preoccupied his thoughts. He wished to rebuild it from foundation to roof-tree, so that it might be called *Neropolis*.

For a century past, Rome had been growing to be the wonder of the world, and it now equalled in grandeur the ancient capitals of Asia. Its buildings were handsome, strong, and solid; but the streets had a mean appearance in the eyes of the people of fashion. For the public taste of the age had a constantly increasing tendency to admire decorative but commonplace edifices; it aspired to those displays of uniformity which bring delight to the gaping sight-seer, and sought for a thousand frivolities unknown to the ancient Greeks. Nero headed the movement; the Rome that he imagined must have somewhat resembled the Paris of our own days, one of those artificial towns built to order, in which the admiration of provincial and foreign visitors has been the principal object kept in view. The crackbrained young man intoxicated himself with these disordered fancies. He longed, also, for something strange, some grandiose spectacle worthy of an artist, an event which should mark a date for his reign. 'Until my time,' he used to say, 'the extent of what is permitted a prince was not known.' All these inward promptings of a disordered imagination seemed to become incarnate in an extraordinary event which, for the subject which occupies us, had the most momentous consequences.

Incendiary mania being contagious and often complicated by hallucinations, it is very dangerous to awaken it in the feeble minds in which it lies dormant. It was one of the features of Nero's character that he was unable to resist the fixed idea of a crime. The burning of Troy, which he had been in the habit of acting since his childhood, had a

terrible fascination for him. One of the dramatic pieces which he had represented in one of his festivals was the *Incendium* of Afranius, in which a conflagration was seen on the stage. During one of his fits of egoistic fury against destiny, he cried, 'Happy Priam, who was able to behold with his own eyes his kingship and his country perish at one and the same moment!' On another occasion, hearing some one quote a Greek verse from the *Bellerophon* of Euripides, which signified, 'When I am dead, let fire consume the world!' 'Oh, no,' he said, 'far rather when I am alive!' The tradition according to which Nero set Rome on fire, simply to have a repetition of the burning of Troy, is assuredly exaggerated, since, as we shall proceed to show, Nero was absent from the city when the fire broke out. And yet this version is not destitute of all truth; the demon of perverted histrionism, which had taken possession of him, was, as among the ruffians of another epoch, one of the principal actors in the horrible crime.

On July the 19th, in the year 64, fire seized on Rome with extreme violence. It began near the Porta Capena, in the part of the great Amphitheatre adjoining the Palatine Hill and Mount Coelius. This quarter contained many shops full of inflammable goods, among which the conflagration spread with prodigious rapidity. Thence it proceeded round the Palatine, devastated the Velabrum, the Forum, the Carinæ, mounted up the hill-sides, worked great damage on the Palatine, and descended once more into the valleys, devouring, during six days and seven nights, densely-populated quarters pierced with tortuous streets. A number of houses which were pulled down at the foot of the Esquiline Hill stopped it for some time; then it blazed up again and lasted for three days longer. The number of deaths was considerable. Of the fourteen districts of which the town was composed, three were entirely destroyed, seven others were reduced to blackened walls. Rome was an extremely crowded city, with a very dense population. The disaster was frightful, and its like had never before been known.

Nero was at Antium when the fire broke out. He only entered the city about the time when the conflagration was approaching his 'transitory' palace. It was impossible to save anything from the flames. The imperial residences on the Palatine, the 'transitory' palace itself, with its out-buildings and the whole surrounding neighbourhood, were entirely swallowed up. Nero evidently attached small importance to his house being saved. The sublime horror of the spectacle transported him with delight. Later, it was asserted that he had gazed on the conflagration from the summit of a tower, and there, in theatrical costume, a lyre in his hand, had sung, in the touching harmonies of the ancient elegy, the destruction of Ilium.

In this we have to deal with a legend, a product of the age and of successive exaggerations ; but one point, on which opinion was universally agreed at the very first, was, that the fire had been commanded by Nero or at least rekindled by him when it was about to expire. It was believed that members of his household had been seen lighting it in various places. In certain spots the fire had been set burning, it was said, by men feigning drunkenness. The conflagration had the appearance of springing up simultaneously in several places at once. Men told how, during its progress, they had seen the soldiers and watchmen, whose duty it was to extinguish it, stirring it up and preventing the efforts that were being made to circumscribe its area ; and all this with a threatening air and the manner of people who were carrying out official instructions. Great stone constructions, adjoining the imperial abode, the site of which Nero coveted, were razed to the ground as in a siege. When the fire recommenced, it started in the buildings which belonged to Tigellinus. What confirmed the suspicions was, that Nero, under the pretext of clearing away the ruins at his own expense, so as to leave the ground free for the owners, took upon himself to remove the débris, so well that no one was permitted to approach. Suspicions were still stronger when he was seen to be profiting from the ruins of the country, when his new palace, that 'House

of Gold,' which had long been the plaything of his delirious imagination, was seen rising on the site of the former temporary residence, enriched by the extra space which had been cleared by the conflagration. It was thought that he had wished to prepare the demesnes of this new palace, to justify the reconstruction which he had long projected, to obtain money by appropriating the débris of the fire—in short, to satisfy his insane vanity, which made him desire to have Rome to rebuild so that it might date from him, and that he might give it his name.

Everything inclines one to the belief that there was no calumny in all this. The truth, when Nero is in question, can scarce have the semblance of truth. Let it not be said that, with the power at his command, he possessed more simple means than incendiarism to procure the ground that he desired. The power of the Emperors, in one sense boundless, in another soon found its limits in the usages and prejudices of a people conservative to the highest degree in all that concerned its religious monuments. Rome was full of sanctuaries, of holy places, of *area*, of edifices which no law of confiscation could cause to disappear. Cæsar and several other Emperors had seen their schemes of public utility, more especially those which dealt with the rectification of the course of the Tiber, thwarted by this obstruction. For the execution of his senseless projects Nero had really but one expedient, incendiarism. The position resembled that which obtains at Constantinople and in other great Mussulman cities, the reconstruction of which is prevented by the mosques and the *ouakouf*. In the East, fire is but a feeble expedient, for after a conflagration the ground, which is considered a kind of inalienable patrimony of the believers, remains holy. At Rome, where religion attached itself more to the building than to the site, the measure was found of utility. A new Rome, with wide streets drawn accurately straight, was soon constructed on plans drawn by the Emperor and for bounties which he offered.

The feelings of every honest man in the city were out-

raged. The most precious antiquities of Rome, the houses of the ancient captains—still adorned with triumphal spoils—the most sacred objects, trophies, *ex voto* relics, the temples held in highest veneration—all the material side of the old Roman religion had disappeared. There was, as it were, mourning for the memories and legends of the nation. It was vain for Nero to incur expense in alleviating the miseries of which he was the cause; it was vain for him to point out that all, in the last analysis, reduced itself to a measure of cleansing and sanitation, that the new city would be far superior to the old; no true Roman would believe it, all those for whom a city was something other than a mere mass of stones were stricken to the heart, the national conscience was wounded. This temple, built by Evander, that other raised by Servius Tullius, the sacred court of Jupiter Stator, the palace of Numa, the household gods of the Roman people, the monuments of so many victories, the masterpieces of Greek art—how was their loss to be repaired? Beside these, of what value were displays of ostentation, vast monumental perspectives, endless straight lines? Expiatory ceremonies were performed, the Sibylline books were consulted, women above all celebrated different *piacula*. But there remained the secret consciousness of a crime, an infamy. Nero began to perceive that he had gone a little too far.



## CHAPTER VII

### MASSACRE OF THE CHRISTIANS—NERO'S ÆSTHETICS

THEN an infernal idea entered Nero's mind. He bethought himself if there were not in the world some miserable beings even more hated than himself by the citizens of Rome, on whom he could cause the odium of the fire to fall. He dreamed of the Christians. The horror with which these latter regarded the temples and the most venerated edifices of the Romans, gave sufficient acceptance to the idea that they were the authors of a fire which had had the effect of destroying these sanctuaries. Their downcast air before the national monuments seemed an insult to the state. Rome was a very religious city, and anyone protesting against the national worship, recognised his mistake very speedily. It must be remembered that certain uncompromising Jews went so far as to refuse to touch a coin bearing an effigy, and considered the act of looking at an image, or carrying it about, to be as great a crime as that of sculpture. Others declined to pass through a city gate if it were surmounted by a statue. All this provoked the derision and ill-will of the populace. It may be that the discourses of the Christians on the great final conflagration, their sinister prophecies, their affectation of repeating that the world was about to end, and end by fire, contributed to make them be regarded as incendiaries. It is even not inadmissible that several of the faithful may have been guilty of imprudences, and that there may have been some pretexts for accusing them of having desired to justify their oracles by furnishing a prelude to the heavenly flames. What *piaculum*, after all, could be more efficacious than

the punishment of these foes of the gods? Seeing them subjected to atrocious torture, the people would say, 'Ah, there can be no doubt that they are the culprits!' It must be remembered that public opinion regarded as verified facts the most odious crimes that were fathered on the Christians.

Let us entirely dismiss the idea that the pious disciples of Jesus were in any degree guilty of the crime of which they were accused; let it only be said that there were many indications which might mislead opinion. They had not lit this conflagration, but assuredly they rejoiced in it. The Christians desired the end of society and predicted it. In the Apocalypse, it is the secret prayers of the saints which consume the earth with fire and make it tremble. While the disaster was in progress, the attitude of the faithful must have seemed equivocal; some, no doubt, failed to manifest respect and regret before the ruined temples, or even did not conceal a certain satisfaction. One can imagine a conventicle meeting in the depths of the Trastevere in which someone would observe, 'Is not this exactly what we foretold?' It is often dangerous to have shown one's self too much of a prophet. 'Did we wish to avenge ourselves?' said Tertullian, 'a single night and a few torches would suffice.' The accusation of fire-raising was frequently brought against the Jews on account of their life apart. The same crime was one of those *flagitia coherentia nomini* which formed part of the definition of a Christian.

Without having in any way contributed to the catastrophe of July 19th, the Christians might then be considered as incendiaries so far as desire went. In four years and a half the Apocalypse is to offer us a poem on the burning of Rome, for which the event of 64 probably furnished more than one feature. The destruction of Rome by flames was indeed one of the dreams of both Jews and Christians, but it was only a dream; the pious sectaries assuredly contented themselves with beholding in spirit the saints and angels applauding from the heights of heaven what they regarded as a just atonement.

It is difficult to believe that the idea of accusing the

Christians of causing the conflagration of July came of itself to Nero. Certainly, had the Cæsar possessed a close acquaintance with the pious brethren, he would have had an extraordinary hatred for them. The Christians were naturally unable to appreciate the merit there was in thus posing as *jeune premier* on the proscenium of contemporary society; and if anything exasperated Nero more than another, it was that his talent as artist and leading actor should be slighted. But no doubt Nero only possessed a hearsay knowledge of the Christians and never had any personal relations with them. By whom was the atrocious expedient in question suggested? It is probable that in several quarters of the city suspicions had been formed. The sect, at this epoch, was well known in the official world. It gave rise to much discussion. We have seen that Paul had intercourse with persons attached to the service of the imperial palace. A very extraordinary thing is, that among the promises made by certain persons to Nero, in the event of his being deprived of the Empire, was that of dominion over the East, and, more especially, over the kingdom of Jerusalem. Messianic ideas often took, amongst the Roman Jews, the form of vague hopes for an Oriental Roman Empire. Later, Vespasian profited by these imaginations. From the accession of Caligula to the death of Nero, Jewish intrigues never ceased at Rome. The Jews had contributed much to the advent and support of the family of Germanicus. Whether by the Herods, or by other intrigues, they used to besiege the palace, too often to the ruin of their enemies. Agrippa II. had been very powerful under both Caligula and Claudius; during his residence in Rome he played the part of a man of influence. Tiberius Alexander, for his part, occupied the highest offices. And, lastly, Josephus shows himself somewhat favourably inclined towards Nero; he concludes that he has been calumniated, he throws the blame of all his crimes on his evil counsellors. As for Poppæa, he makes of her a woman of piety, because she was well disposed towards the Jews, because she supported the requests of the zealots, and also,

perhaps, because she adopted part of their rites. He made her acquaintance in 62 or 63, obtained through her pardon for some Jewish priests who had been arrested, and cherished the most grateful memories of her. We have the touching epitaph of a Jewess called Esther, born at Jerusalem, and set at liberty by Claudius or Nero, who charges her friend Arescusus to keep watch lest anything contrary to the Law, such as the letters D.M., be inscribed on her sepulchral stone. Rome possessed actors and actresses of Jewish origin; under Nero, to be an actor was a natural means for coming under the Emperor's notice. One in particular is mentioned, a certain Alityrus, a Jewish comedian highly esteemed by Nero and Poppæa; it was by him that Josephus was presented to the Empress. Nero, full of hatred for all that was Roman, loved to turn towards the East, to surround himself with people of Oriental birth, to carry on intrigues in the East.

Does all this afford sufficient ground for a plausible hypothesis? Is it possible to attribute to the hatred of the Jews against the Christians, the ferocious caprice which exposed the most inoffensive of men to the most monstrous tortures? It is certainly unfortunate for the Jews that they should have had their secret access to Nero and Poppæa at the time when the Emperor conceived a horrible idea with reference to the disciples of Jesus. Tiberius Alexander, in particular, was then in the height of favour, and a man of his character must have detested the saints. As a rule, the Romans confounded Jews and Christians. Why, in this case, was the distinction so well made? Why were the Jews, for whom the Romans had the same moral antipathy and religious prejudices as for the Christians, not touched on this occasion? Persecution of the Jews would have been quite as efficacious a *piaculum*. Clement of Rome, or the author (certainly a Roman) of the epistle attributed to him, in the passage in which he alludes to the massacres of Christians ordered by Nero, explains them in a manner which, while very obscure to us, is highly characteristic. All these misfortunes are 'the result of jealousy,' and this

word 'jealousy' evidently has the significance here of internal dissensions, animosities between members of the same brotherhood. From this arose a suspicion corroborated by the incontestable fact that the Jews, before the destruction of Jerusalem, were the true persecutors of the Christians, and left no stone unturned to compass their extermination. There was a widely-spread tradition in the fourth century, according to which the death of Paul and even that of Peter, which were not disassociated from the persecution of the year 64, had as their cause the conversion of a favourite of Nero's and one of his mistresses. Another tradition beheld in it a consequence of the downfall of Simon the Magician. In the case of an individual so fantastic as Nero, all conjecture is hazardous. Perhaps the choice of the Christians, as victims of the frightful massacre, was a mere whim of the Emperor or of Tigellinus. Nero had no need of anyone's aid in order to conceive a design capable of baffling by its monstrous nature all the ordinary rules of historical induction.

At the outset, a certain number of persons suspected of forming part of the new sect were arrested and flung into a prison, which was a torture in itself. They confessed their faith, which might be considered as an avowal of the crime which was held to be inseparable from it. These first arrests were followed by a great many others. The majority of those inculpated appear to have been proselytes observing the precepts and conventions of the pact of Jerusalem. It is not admissible that true Christians could have denounced their brethren; but it was possible to seize on documents, and some neophytes, scarcely initiated, may have given way under torture. Surprise was felt at the multitude of adherents whom these dark doctrines had brought together, and the matter was discussed not without apprehension. All sensible men considered the charge of incendiarism extremely weak. 'Their true crime,' it was said, 'lies in their hatred of the human race.' Although convinced that the conflagration was Nero's own crime, many serious Romans saw in this cast of the net by the police a way of

ridding the city of a very murderous pest. Tacitus, despite some qualms of pity, is of this opinion. As for Suetonius, he ranks among the praiseworthy measures of Nero the persecutions which he inflicted on the partizans of the new and pernicious superstition.

These persecutions were of a terrible description. Never before had such refinements of cruelty been witnessed. Nearly all the Christians arrested were *humiliores*, people of no importance. The punishment of these unhappy beings, when their offence was high treason or sacrilege, consisted in their being thrown to wild beasts, or burned alive in the amphitheatre with the accompaniment of cruel scourgings. One of the most hideous features of Roman manners was that of making torture the occasion for a festival, the sight of butchery a public entertainment. Persia, in her moments of fanaticism and terror, had witnessed frightful displays of torment; more than once she had tasted therein a kind of gloomy pleasure; but never before the establishment of Roman rule had men made these horrors a public pastime, a matter for laughter and applause. The amphitheatres had become places of execution; the tribunals of justice supplied the arena. The whole world's condemned felons were dragged to Rome to fill the circus, and provide amusement for the populace. When to all this is added an atrocious exaggeration in the penal law, which caused simple misdemeanours to be punished with death, and numerous judicial errors resulting from a faulty criminal procedure, one can conceive how greatly all ideas were perverted. Those who underwent punishment were regarded rather as unfortunate victims than as criminals; in the mass they were considered as nearly innocent, *innocia corpora*.

On this occasion, to the barbarity of the punishments was added derision. The victims were reserved for a festival to which, no doubt, an expiatory character was attached. Roman annals had known few days so extraordinary. The *ludus matutinus*, usually devoted to fights between animals, saw an unheard-of procession. The



victims, covered with the skins of wild beasts, were driven into the arena, where they were torn in pieces by dogs, others were crucified, while yet others, clad in tunics soaked in oil, pitch, or resin, found themselves tied to stakes and reserved to light up the evening festivities. When it grew dark, these living torches were lighted. Nero offered for the spectacle his magnificent gardens beyond the Tiber, which were on the site now occupied by the Borgo and the square and church of St. Peter. Here there was an amphitheatre commenced by Caligula, and continued by Claudius, of which an obelisk taken from Heliopolis (that which, in our own days, marks the centre of the square of St. Peter) formed the boundary. This place had already seen massacres by torchlight. Caligula, strolling about the while, had had beheaded by the light of torches a certain number of persons of consular rank, senators, and Roman ladies. The idea of replacing the lanterns by human bodies soaked with inflammable substances might seem ingenious. As a punishment, this fashion of burning alive was not new; under the name of the *tunica molesta* it was the usual penalty for incendiaries, but it had never been employed as a system of illumination. By the light of these hideous torches, Nero, who had made evening races fashionable, showed himself in the arena now mingling with the populace in jockey costume, now driving his chariot and seeking for applause. There were, however, some signs of compassion. Even those who believed in the guilt of the Christians, and avowed that they had deserved the severest punishment, held these cruel pleasures in horror. Sensible men wished that only what public utility demanded should be performed, that the city should be purged of dangerous persons, but that it should not appear as though criminals were being sacrificed to the ferocity of a single man.

Matrons and virgins were included in these horrible sports, and the nameless indignities which they had to undergo formed part of the entertainment. Under Nero the usage had become established of making condemned felons play in the amphitheatre mythological parts culminat-

ing in the death of the actor. These hideous operas, for which the science of stage machinery provided wonderful effects, were quite a novelty; Greece would have been astounded had such an attempt to apply ferocity to æsthetic purposes, to produce art with torture, been suggested to her. The unhappy wretch was brought into the arena richly clad as a god or a hero destined to death; and he then represented by his punishment some tragic scene from the myths consecrated by sculptors and poets. Now it was Hercules in his fury, being burned on Mount Ætna, tearing from his flesh the tunic of blazing pitch, now Orpheus rent in pieces by a bear, Dædalus cast down from heaven and devoured by wild beasts, Pasiphæ in the embraces of the bull, or the murder of Attys; sometimes there were horrible masquerades in which the men were attired as priests of Saturn with a red mantle on their backs, the women as priestesses of Ceres, wearing fillets on the forehead; on other occasions dramatic pieces were played, in the course of which the hero was really put to death, like Laureolus, or else representation of tragic deeds like that of Mucius Scævola. At the close, Mercury, with an iron rod made red-hot in the fire, touched each corpse to see if it moved, and masked servants, representing Pluto or Orchus, dragged off the dead bodies by the feet, killing with clubs all those which still throbbed with life.

The most honoured Christian ladies had to lend themselves to these monstrosities. Some played the part of the Danaïdes, others that of Dirce. It is difficult to understand how the fable of the Danaïdes could furnish material for a scene of bloodshed. The punishment attributed by all mythological tradition to these guilty women, which they were depicted as undergoing, was not sufficiently cruel to suffice for the pleasures of Nero and the frequenters of his amphitheatre. Perhaps they defiled past bearing urns, and received the fatal blow from an actor filling the rôle of Lynceus. It may be that Amygone was represented pursued by a satyr and ravished by Neptune. It is possible indeed that these unhappy women successively underwent,

before the spectators, the whole series of torments endured by Tartarus and died after hours of torture. Representations of hell were in fashion. Some years before (in 41) Egyptians and Nubians had come to Rome and achieved great success by giving night seances in which were represented in their order the horrors of the subterranean world, according to the mural paintings in the sepulchres at Thebes, notably those of the tomb of Seth I.

There is no doubt as to the tortures of those who represented Dirce. The colossal group called the Farnese Bull, now in the Naples Museum, is well known. Amphion and Zethos are attaching Dirce to the horns of a bull, which is to drag her through the rocks and briers of Cithæron. This mediocre Rhodian marble, brought to Rome about the time of Augustus, was the object of universal admiration. What finer subject for that hideous art made fashionable by the cruelty of the age, which consisted in making *tableaux vivants* of ancient statues? A text and a Pompeian fresco seem to prove that the terrible scene was often represented in the arenas when a woman was the victim. Naked and fastened by the hair to the horns of an infuriated bull, the unhappy beings feasted the lustful gaze of a ferocious populace. Some of the Christian women sacrificed in this manner were of feeble strength; their courage was superhuman, but the infamous rabble had eyes only for their bodies rent open and their torn bosoms.

There can be no doubt that Nero was present at these spectacles. As he was short-sighted, he was accustomed, when surveying the struggles of the gladiators, to wear in his eye a concave emerald, which served him as an eyeglass. He loved to show off his knowledge of sculpture; it is asserted, indeed, that he gave vent to odious remarks over the corpse of his mother, praising this feature and finding fault with that. Human flesh quivering under the teeth of wild beasts, a poor timid girl veiling her nudity with a chaste gesture and then tossed by a bull and rent in fragments on the pebbles of the arena, must have offered plastic forms and colours worthy of such a connoisseur as he. He

was there in the front row, on the *podium*, in the midst of the Vestals and the Curule magistrates, with his wicked face, his short-sight, his blue eyes, his elaborately-curled auburn hair, his obstinate lips, his bearing, at once evil and foolish like that of a great baby stupidly solemn and puffed up with vanity, while brazen-throated music vibrated in the air pervaded with the reek of blood. He discoursed, no doubt, as might an artist on the modest attitudes of the new Dircaë, and discovered, I imagine, that a certain air of resignation gave these pure women, about to be torn in pieces, a charm such as up till then he had not known.

This hideous scene was long remembered, and even under Domitian, when an actor was seen being put to death in his part, above all a Laureolus really dying on the cross, men thought of the *piacula* of the year 64, and supposed this to be one of the incendiaries of Rome. The names of *sarmentitii* or *sarmentarii* (people suspected of heresy), of *semarii* (stakes for the funeral pyre), and the popular cry, 'The Christians to the lions!' also appear to date from this period. Nero, with a kind of accomplished art, had impressed nascent Christianity with an indelible stamp; the blood-stained *nævus*, inscribed on the forehead of the martyred Church, was never to be effaced.

Those of the brethren who were not tortured, shared, in some measure, the torments of the others by the sympathy which they showed them, and the care which they took to visit them in prison. They often purchased this dangerous privilege at the cost of all their possessions. The survivors of the crisis were entirely ruined. But of that they scarcely thought; they beheld only the enduring riches of heaven, and repeated to one another without ceasing: 'For yet a very little while, he that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus opened the extraordinary poem of Christian martyrdom, that epic of the amphitheatre which was to last for two hundred and fifty years, and result in the ennoblement of woman, the rehabilitation of the slave, by episodes such as these: Blandina on the cross, dazzling the gaze of her

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews x. 37.

companions, who see in the pale and gentle serving-maid the image of Jesus crucified; Potamiæna defended against outrage by the young officer who is leading her to her fate; the rabble seized with horror when it beholds the humid beasts of Felicity; Perpetua adjusting in the arena her hair trampled by the beasts, that she may not appear troubled. Legend relates how one of these saintly women met, on her way to the torture, a young man who, touched by her beauty, cast on her a look of pity. Wishing to leave him some memorial of her, she drew off the kerchief which covered her bosom and gave it to him; intoxicated by this love-token, the young man, an instant afterwards, ran to martyrdom. Such, in fact, was the perilous charm of these blood-stained dramas in Rome and Lyons and Carthage, that the voluptuous joy of the sufferers of the amphitheatre became contagious, as did, in the Reign of Terror, the resignation of the 'victims.' The Christians impressed the imagination of the period as, before all else, a race determined to suffer; desire for death was henceforth their sign. To check overlongings for martyrdom, was necessary the most terrible of threats—the note of heresy, expulsion from the Church.

The fault committed by the enlightened classes of the Empire, in provoking this feverish exaltation, cannot be sufficiently censured. To suffer for his faith is for man so sweet, that this attraction alone suffices to make him believe. More than one doubter has been converted for no other reason; even in the East impostors are known to lie for the pleasure of lying, and being the victims of their own falsehood. There is no sceptic who does not regard the martyr with jealousy, and envy him the supreme happiness of affirming something. A secret instinct, moreover, always inclines us to take the part of those who are persecuted. Whoever, then, imagines that he can check a religious or social movement by coercive measures, proves his absolute ignorance of the human heart, and shows that he does not know the true means of political action.

What has happened once can happen again. Tacitus



would have turned away with indignation had he been shown the future of those Christians whom he treated as despicable wretches. Honest Romans would have protested if some observer, dowered with the spirit of prophecy, had dared to say to them, 'These incendiaries will be the salvation of the world.' Thence arises an eternal objection to the dogmatism of conservative parties, an incurable warping of conscience, a secret perversion of judgment. Miserable creatures, under the ban of all respectable people, have become saints. It would not be a good thing for contradictions of this nature to occur too frequently. It is for the welfare of society that its verdicts should not be too often revised. Since the condemnation of Jesus, since martyrs have been known to carry their cause in revolt against the law, there has always been, so far as social crimes are concerned, a secret appeal, as it were, from judgment. There has been no condemned felon but can have said, 'Jesus also was struck down; the martyrs were regarded as dangerous men of whom society had to be purged, and, nevertheless, succeeding centuries have rehabilitated them.' In all this how serious a wound there is to those dull affirmations, by which a society seeks to persuade itself that its foes lack all reason and all morality!

After the day on which Jesus expired on Golgotha, the day of the festival in Nero's gardens (which can be fixed as being about August 1st of the year 64) was the most solemn in the history of Christianity. The solidity of a structure is in ratio to the sum of virtue, of sacrifices, and of devotion which are at its foundations. The fanatics alone found anything; Judaism still endures because of the intense frenzy of its prophets and zealots, Christianity because of the courage of its first witnesses. Nero's orgy was the great baptism of blood which singled out Rome as the town of martyrs, to play a part by itself in the history of Christianity and be the second sacred city. It was the seizure of the Vatican hill by these conquerors of a new order until then unknown. The hare-brained scoundrel who governed the world did not perceive that he was the



founder of a new era, and that he was signing for the future a charter, written in scarlet, the provisions of which were to be claimed at the end of eighteen hundred years. Rome, rendered responsible by all the blood that had been shed, became, like Babylon, a kind of sacramental and symbolical city. In any case, Nero took on that day a place of the first importance in the history of Christianity. This miracle of horror, this prodigy of perversity, was for all an evident sign. A hundred and fifty years later Tertullian cries: 'Yea, we are proud that our outlawry should have been first pronounced by such a man! He that has really learnt to know him, understands how that which Nero condemned can be naught save a great good.' Already the idea was diffused that the coming of the true Christ would be preceded by the coming of a kind of infernal Christ, who, in all things, should be the antithesis of Jesus. There was no reason for doubt; the *Antichrist*, the Christ of evil, existed. The *Antichrist* was this monster with a human face, in whom were mingled ferocity, hypocrisy, shamelessness and pride; who strutted abroad as a farcical hero, lighted his triumphs as a coachman with torches of human flesh, waxed drunken with the blood of the saints, perhaps did worse still. One is, in fact, tempted to believe that it is to the Christians that a passage in Suetonius, concerning a monstrous sport of Nero's invention, refers. To the stakes of the arena, youths, men, women and young girls were bound naked. Then a beast emerged from the *cavea* and satisfied his fury on each of these bodies.—The freed slave Doryphorus made a semblance of beating down the beast, who was none other than Nero, clad in the hide of a wild animal. Doryphorus was an infamous wretch, to whom Nero had espoused himself, uttering the shrieks of an outraged virgin. The name for Nero has been found; it shall be THE BEAST. Caligula has been the *Anti-God*, Nero shall be the *Anti-Christ*. The Apocalypse is conceived. The Christian virgin who, bound to the stake, has suffered the hideous embraces of the Beast, will bear that frightful image with her into eternity.

It was on this day also that, by a strange antithesis, was created the paradox, full of charm, on which humanity has lived for centuries, and, in part, lives still. It was a day of note for heaven when Christian chastity, up till then carefully hidden, appeared in the full light of day, before fifty thousand spectators, and posed as in a sculptor's studio in the attitude of a virgin awaiting death. Revelation of a secret unknown to antiquity, startling proclamation of the principle that modesty has a voluptuous charm and a beauty all its own! Already we have seen the great magician, called imagination, who from century to century modifies the ideal of woman, working without cease at the task of placing above perfection of form the attraction of modesty (Poppæa owed her power solely to giving herself the external appearance of it) and a resigned humility (herein was the triumph of the good Acte). Accustomed ever to march at the head of his age into the ways of the unknown, Nero was apparently the first to taste this feeling, and discovered, in the course of his artistic debauchery, the love philtre of Christian æsthetics. His passion for Acte and for Poppæa proves that he was capable of delicacy in sensation, and as the monstrous entered into all that he touched, he wished to give himself the spectacle of his dreams. The image of the ancestress of Cymodocée was refracted like the heroine of an antique cameo in the focus of his emerald. In gaining the applause of a connoisseur so exquisite, of a friend of Petronius, who perhaps saluted the *moritura* with one of those quotations from the Greek poets which he loved, the timid nudity of the young martyr came to rival the self-assured nudity of a Greek Venus. When the brutal hand of that exhausted world, which sought its entertainment in the torments of a poor girl, had torn off the veils of Christian chastity, she might exclaim: 'I also am beautiful.' It was the principle of a new art. Blossoming forth under the eyes of Nero, the æsthetics of the disciples of Jesus, up till then self-unconscious, owed the revelation of its magic to the crime which, tearing off its vesture, deflowered it of its virginity.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DEATH OF ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL

THERE is no certain knowledge as to the names of any of the Christians who perished at Rome in the horrible events of August 64. The persons arrested had only been converted a short time and scarcely knew each other. The names of these holy women who astounded the Church by their constancy are unknown. In Roman tradition they are only called 'the Danaïdes and the Dircaë.' However, the images of the places remained vivid and profound in men's memories. The circus or *naumachia*, the two boundary poles, the obelisk, and a terebinth tree, which served as a rallying point for the memories of the earlier Christian generations, became the fundamental elements of a whole ecclesiastical topography which resulted in the consecration of the Vatican, and in that hill being selected for a religious destiny of the first importance.

Although the affair may have had special application to the city of Rome, and have been, before all else, for the purpose of appeasing public opinion among the Romans irritated by the fire, the atrocity commanded by Nero must have had its reactions in the provinces, and there excited a recrudescence of persecution. The Churches of Asia Minor in particular had heavy trials to undergo, for the pagan populations of these lands were prompt to fanaticism. There were imprisonments at Smyrna. Pergamum had a martyr, known to us by the name of Antipas, who appears to have suffered near the famous temple of Æsculapius, perhaps in a wooden amphitheatre in the neighbourhood of

the building, as an incident of some festival. Pergamum was, apart from Cyzicus, the only town in Asia Minor which had a regular organisation for gladiatorial games. We know for certain that these games were, at Pergamum, placed under the authority of the priests. Without there being any edict formally prohibiting the profession of Christianity, such a profession in reality entailed outlawry; *hostis, hostis patriæ, hostis publicus, humani generis inimicus, hostis deorum atque hominum*, are all so many appellations written in the laws to designate those who put society in peril, and against whom every man, in Tertullian's phrase, became a soldier. The very name of Christian was thus a crime. Since the fullest arbitrary power was permitted the magistrates in their judgment of such offences, the life of every believer, from this day forth, was at the mercy of magistrates of horrible severity, filled with ferocious prejudices against them.

It may be permitted us, without transgressing the bounds of probability, to connect with the events which have just been narrated, the death of the apostles Peter and Paul. A truly strange destiny has caused the disappearance of these two extraordinary men to be enveloped in mystery. One certain fact is, that Peter died a martyr. It can scarcely be conceived that his martyrdom took place elsewhere than in Rome, and in Rome the only known historical incident by which his death can be explained is the episode related by Tacitus. As to Paul, there are weighty reasons which also lead us to believe that he died a martyr, and died at Rome. It is natural, then, to connect his death also with the episode of July and August, 64. Thus was cemented by punishment the reconciliation of these two souls, the one so strong, the other so good; thus was established by legendary, that is to say divine, authority, the touching fraternity of two men who by factions were opposed to one another, but who, we can believe, were superior to factions and always loved one another. The great legend of Peter and Paul, parallel with that of Romulus and Remus, founding by a kind of inimical collaboration the grandeur of Rome, a

legend which, in one sense, has had almost as much importance in human history as that of Jesus, dates from the day which, according to tradition, saw them die together. Nero, without knowing it, was again in this the most efficacious agent in the creation of Christianity, the man who laid the corner stone of the city of the saints.

As to the form of the death suffered by the two apostles, we know with certainty that Peter was crucified. According to ancient texts, his wife was put to death with him, and he saw her led to execution. A narrative, accepted from the third century onwards, runs that, deeming himself too humble to be placed on an equality with Jesus, he asked to be crucified head downwards. The characteristic feature of the butchery of 64 having been the quest of hateful eccentricities in torture, it is possible that, in point of fact, Peter may have been presented to the rabble in this hideous attitude. Seneca mentions cases in which tyrants have been known to turn the heads of crucified victims to the ground. Then Christian piety no doubt saw a mystical refinement in what was nothing save a grotesque caprice of the executioners. Perhaps the saying in the fourth Gospel, 'Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not,'<sup>1</sup> contains some allusion to a peculiarity in Peter's execution. Paul, in his status of *honestior*, was beheaded. It is also probable that he received a regular trial, and was not included in the summary condemnation of the victims of Nero's festival. According to certain indications, Timothy was arrested with his master and kept in prison.

At the beginning of the third century two monuments were already to be seen in the vicinity of Rome, to which the names of the apostles Peter and Paul were attached. One, situated at the foot of the Vatican Hill, was that of St. Peter, the other on the Via Ostia was that of St. Paul. In oratorical language they were called 'the trophies' of the apostles, and were probably *cellæ* or *memoriæ* consecrated to the two saints. Such monuments publicly existed before

<sup>1</sup>John xxi. 18.



the time of Constantine; there is, moreover, reason to suppose that these 'trophies' were known only to the faithful; it may even be that they were nothing more than the terebinth tree of the Vatican, with which for centuries was associated the memory of Peter, and the pine of the Salvian Springs which was, according to certain traditions, the centre for reminiscences of Paul. Later, these 'trophies' came to be considered the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul. About the middle of the third century, indeed, two bodies, held in universal veneration as those of the apostles, made their appearance apparently from the catacombs of the Via Appia, in which there actually were several Jewish cemeteries. In the fourth century these corpses rested in the neighbourhood of the two 'trophies.' Above the 'trophies' then rose two basilicas, one of which has become the present basilica of St. Peter, while the other, St. Paul-beyond-the-Walls, has retained its essential form until our own time.

Did the 'trophies,' venerated by the Christians about the year 200, really designate the places where the apostles had suffered? It may be so. It is not unlikely that Paul, towards the close of his life, dwelt in the suburb which stretched out of the Porta Lavernalis along the Via Ostia. The shade of Peter elsewhere wanders ever, in Christian legend, about the foot of the Vatican and Nero's gardens and circus, more especially round the obelisk. This latter tradition may have arisen, of course, from the circus in question having retained the memory of the martyrs of 64, to whom, failing precise indication, Christian tradition might join Peter; we rather prefer to believe, however, that in all this was mingled some truth, and that the ancient site of the obelisk in the vestibule of St. Peter's, now marked by an inscription, almost indicates the spot on which Peter on the cross satiated, with his terrible agony, the eyes of a populace greedy to behold suffering. Are the bodies themselves, surrounded since the third century by an uninterrupted tradition of veneration, those of the two apostles? We can scarcely believe it. It is certain that care in cherishing the memory of the martyrs' tombs was



very ancient in the Church ; but Rome about 100 and 120 was the theatre of a vast legendary development, which more especially related to the two apostles Peter and Paul, a development in which pious pretensions played a great part. It is scarce credible that, during the days following on the awful carnage of August 64, it could have been possible to recover the corpses of the victims. In the hideous mass of human flesh, mangled, roasted and trampled upon, which was at that time dragged with hooks into the *spoliarium*, and then cast unto the *puticuli*, it would perhaps have been difficult to identify any of the martyrs. Often, no doubt, permission to withdraw the remains of the victims from the executioners was obtained ; but even in supposing, as we have every right to do, that the brethren may have braved death that they might demand back the precious relics, it is probable that in place of having them given up to them, they may have been sent themselves to swell the mass of corpses. For several days the very name of Christian was alone a death warrant. In any case the matter is of quite secondary importance. If the Vatican basilica does not really cover the tomb of the apostle Peter, it none the less marks for us one of the most truly holy places of Christianity. The place where the bad taste of the seventeenth century constructed a circus of theatrical architecture, was a second Calvary, and, even supposing that Peter was not crucified there, it was undoubtedly on this spot that the Danaïdes and the Dirce suffered their last agonies.

If, as we may be permitted to believe, John accompanied Peter to Rome, we can find a plausible foundation for the old tradition, according to which John was plunged into boiling oil somewhere near the spot where the Porta Latina stood in later years. John appears to have suffered in the name of Jesus. We are inclined to believe that he was a witness and, up to a certain point, a victim of the bloody episode to which the Apocalypse owes its origin. For us, the Apocalypse is the cry of horror uttered by an eye-witness who has dwelt in Babylon, who has known the Beast, who

has seen the bleeding corpses of his martyred brethren, who himself has suffered the embraces of death. The unhappy creatures, doomed to serve as living torches, must have been first plunged into oil or into some inflammable substance (not, it is true, boiling). John was perhaps intended for the same fate as his brethren, and destined to illuminate, on the evening of the festival, the suburb of the Via Latina; and a hazard, a chance may have saved him. The Via Latina, in fact, is situated in the district in which the incidents of these terrible days took place. The southern part of Rome (the Porta Capena, the Via Ostia, the Via Appia and the Via Latina) forms the region round which the history of the early Church seems to concentrate itself in the time of Nero.

A jealous fate has decreed that on very many points which arouse our keen curiosity we can never emerge from the shadowy gloom in which legend dwells. Let us repeat once more: questions relating to the death of the apostles Peter and Paul can only be settled by probable hypotheses. The death of Paul especially is enveloped in great mystery. Certain expressions in the Apocalypse, written at the end of 68, or at the beginning of 69, would incline one to think that the author of this book believed Paul to be alive when he was writing. It is by no means impossible that the end of the great apostle may have been quite unknown. In the western journey attributed to him by certain texts, a shipwreck, an illness, or some accident may have carried him off. As at that time he did not have about him his brilliant galaxy of disciples, the details of his death would remain unknown; at a later date legend would supply these details, taking account on the one hand of the status of Roman citizen accorded him in the Acts, on the other of the desire felt by the Christian conscience of reconciling him with Peter. Certainly there is something pleasing for us in the thought of an obscure death for the stormy apostle. We should like to imagine Paul, sceptical, shipwrecked, abandoned, betrayed by his companions, alone, a prey to the disenchantment of old age; it would

please us to know that the scales fell a second time from his eyes, and our gentle incredulity would have its little revenge, had the most dogmatic of men died lacking all hope (let us rather say tranquil), on some river bank or road in Spain, exclaiming, he too: *Ergo erravi!* But that would be to attribute too much to conjecture. It is certain that the two apostles were dead in 70; they did not see the downfall of Jerusalem, which on Paul would have made so deep an impression. We shall admit, then, as probable in the succeeding pages of this history, that the two champions of the Christian doctrine disappeared at Rome during the terrible storm of the year 64. James had died a little more than two years before. Of the 'pillar apostles' there thus remained only John. Other friends of Jesus were, no doubt, still living at Jerusalem, but they were forgotten and, as it were, lost in the dark whirlwind in which Judæa was to be plunged during several years. In the following book we shall show in what manner the Church consummated between Peter and Paul a reconciliation which death had perhaps roughly sketched out. This was the price of success. To all appearance incompatible, Peter's Judeo-Christianity and Paul's Hellenism were alike necessary for the work of the future. Judeo-Christianity represented the conservative spirit without which there is nothing solid; Hellenism, advance and progress without which nothing really exists. Life is the result of a conflict between opposing forces. Death results as much from the absence of every breath of revolution as from an excess of revolution.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MORROW OF THE CRISIS

THE self-consciousness of a united body of men is like that of an individual. Every impression exceeding a certain degree of violence leaves in the patient's *sensorium* a trace equivalent to a lesion, and places it for a long time, if not for ever, under the power of a hallucination or fixed idea. The bloody episode of August 64 had equalled in horror the most hideous dreams that a diseased brain could conceive. During several years the Christian consciousness was, so to speak, to be possessed by it. It was the prey of a kind of dizziness, monstrous dreams tormented it; a cruel death seemed to be the fate reserved for all who were faithful to Jesus. But was not even that the most certain sign of the nearness of the great day? The souls of the Beast's victims were imagined as awaiting the holy hour, under the divine altar, and crying for vengeance. The angel of God calms them, bids them rest patiently, and wait a little longer; the moment is not far distant when their brethren, marked out for immolation, will be slain in their turn. Nero will take that upon himself. Nero is the infernal being to whom God will abandon his power for a moment on the eve of the catastrophe; he is that monster of hell, who must appear as a terror-inspiring meteor on the horizon of the evening of the last days.

Everywhere the air was, as it were, pregnant with the spirit of martyrdom. Those who surrounded Nero seemed animated with a kind of disinterested hatred of morality; from one end of the Mediterranean to the other there was

a struggle to the death between good and evil. The harsh society of Rome had declared pitiless war on piety under all its forms, and the latter saw itself reduced to deserting a world given over to perfidy, and cruelty, and debauchery; there were no honest men who did not have their lives in peril. Nero's jealous wrath against virtue had reached its zenith. Philosophy's one occupation was to prepare its adepts for tortures; Seneca, Thræsea, Barea Soranus, Musonius, and Cornutus had suffered, or were about to suffer, the consequences of their noble protest. Punishment seemed the natural fate of virtue. Even the sceptic Petronius, because he belonged to a polished circle in society, could not live in a world in which Tigellinus was a power. A touching echo of the martyrs of this Reign of Terror has come down to us in inscriptions from the island of religious exiles whence there was no return. In a sepulchral grotto to be seen near Cagliari, a family of exiles, perhaps devoted to the worship of Isis, has bequeathed us its pathetic, almost Christian, lament. As soon as these unfortunates arrived in Sardinia, the husband fell ill owing to the frightful unhealthiness of the island; Benedicta, the wife, made her votive offerings, prayed the gods to take her instead of her husband, and her prayer was answered.

The uselessness of the massacres is to be seen, moreover, in this circumstance. An aristocratic movement, in which only a few are concerned, may be checked by some executions; but the same is not the case with a popular movement, for such a movement requires neither chiefs nor skilful directors. A garden, in which all the flower stalks are cut, is no longer a garden; a mown meadow grows up again better than before. Thus Christianity, far from being checked by Nero's dismal caprice, increased more vigorously than ever; a growing storm of wrath filled the hearts of the survivors, all had but one dream: to become the masters of the pagans and govern them, as they deserved, with a rod of iron. A fire, very different from that which they were accused of having kindled, was to devour this impious city now become the temple of Satan. The doctrine of the



final conflagration of the world took every day stronger roots. Fire alone was to be capable of purging the earth of the infamies which defiled it; fire seemed the only fit and worthy end to such a mass of horrors.

The majority of the Roman Christians, unscathed by Nero's ferocity, doubtless left the city. For ten or twelve years the Roman Church was in extreme confusion, and a great field was thus left open to legend. There was, however, no complete interruption in the community's existence. The seer of the Apocalypse, in December 68 or January 69, commands his people to quit Rome. Even allowing for the prophetic fiction in this passage, it is difficult not to conclude that the Church of Rome soon regained its importance. The chiefs alone definitely abandoned a city where, for the moment, their apostleship could only be sterile.

The portion of the Roman world in which life was then most supportable for the Jews, was the province of Asia. Between the Jewish population of Rome and that of Ephesus there was constant communication. This was the direction taken by the fugitives. Ephesus was to be the spot where resentment, caused by the events of 64, was to run highest. All hatred of Rome was there to be concentrated; thence, in four years' time, was to come the furious invective in which the Christian conscience was to make response to Nero's atrocities.

We do not stretch possibilities in including, among the notable Christians who forsook Rome to escape the severity of the authorities, the apostle whom we have seen following in all things the fortunes of Peter. If the statements relating to the incident which later were inscribed near the Porta Latina have some truth, the supposition may be permitted that the apostle John, escaping death as by a miracle, left the city without delay, and it is only natural that from that time he should have taken refuge in Asia. Like nearly all data concerning the life of the apostles, the traditions about John at Ephesus are subject to doubt, yet they also have their plausible side, and we are inclined rather to admit than to reject them.



The Church at Ephesus was a mixed one ; part owed its faith to Paul, another was Judeo-Christian. This latter portion must have gained the preponderance by the arrival of the Roman colony, above all if that colony brought with it a companion of Jesus, a Hierosolymite doctor, one of those illustrious masters before whom even Paul bowed the knee. Since the deaths of Peter and James, John had been the only surviving apostle of the original band ; he had become the head of all the Judeo-Christian Churches, he was regarded with extreme respect, and a belief (no doubt supported by the apostle himself) had gained currency that Jesus had held him in peculiar affection. A thousand narratives were already based on this report, and for a time Ephesus became the centre of Christendom, Rome and Jerusalem being, by reason of the violence of the age, almost forbidden abodes for the new faith.

There was soon a keen rivalry between the Judeo-Christian community, presided over by the bosom friend of Jesus, and the families of proselytes created by Paul. This rivalry extended to all the Churches of Asia. There were nothing but bitter diatribes against this Balaam who had sown scandal before the sons of Israel, who had taught them that it was no crime to share the sacrament with pagans and espouse pagan women. John, on the contrary, was more and more regarded as a Jewish high priest. Like James he bore the *petalon*, a golden plate, upon his forehead. He was the doctor *par excellence* ; it even became the fashion, perhaps owing to the incident of the boiling oil, to give him the title of martyr.

It seems that Barnabas was among the fugitives who fled from Rome to Ephesus. Timothy, about the same time, was in prison, we know not where, perhaps at Corinth. After some months he was released. Barnabas, as soon as he learnt this good news, seeing that the situation was calmer, formed a project to regain Rome with Timothy, whom he had known and loved in the company of Paul. The apostolic phalanx, dispersed by the storm of 64, made an attempt to unite once more.

The school of Paul was the least consistent; deprived of its chief, it sought for support from the more firmly established portions of the Church. Timothy, accustomed as he was to being led, must have been of small account after the death of Paul. Barnabas, on the other hand, who had always kept in a middle path between the two parties and had not once sinned against charity, became the bond of union between the débris scattered after the great shipwreck. This excellent man was thus once more the saviour of the work of Jesus, the good genius of concord and peace.

It is with the circumstances in question that, in our view, the work bearing the title, difficult to understand, of Epistle to the Hebrews must be connected. This writing seems to have been composed at Ephesus by Barnabas, and addressed to the Church of Rome in the name of the little community of Christians from Italy, who had taken refuge in the capital of Asia. By its position, in some degree an intermediate one at the point of union of many ideas up till then unassociated, the Epistle to the Hebrews rightly belongs to the conciliatory man who, on so many occasions, prevented divergent tendencies in the bosom of the young community from reaching an open rupture. The opposition of the Jewish and the Gentile Churches seems, when one reads this little treatise, a question resolved or rather lost in an overflowing flood of transcendental metaphysics and peaceful charity. As we have remarked, a taste for *midraschim*, or small works of religious exegesis in an epistolary form, had made great progress. Paul had thrown himself, heart and soul, into his Epistle to the Romans; later the 'Epistle to the Ephesians' had been the most advanced statement of his doctrine. The Epistle to the Hebrews seems a manifesto of the same order. No Christian book so greatly resembles the works of the Jewish school at Alexandria, more especially the tractates of Philo. Apollos had already entered on this path, and Paul, while a prisoner, had taken singular pleasure in it. An element, foreign to Jesus, Alexandrianism, was infusing

itself more and more in the heart of Christianity. In the Johannite writings we shall notice this influence exercised in a sovereign manner. In the Epistle to the Hebrews Christian theology shows a strong resemblance to that which we have found in the Epistles written in Paul's later manner. The theory of the *Logos* develops rapidly. More and more Jesus comes to be considered the 'second God,' the *metathron*, the assessor of the diety, the first-born at the right hand of God, and inferior to God alone. On the circumstances of the time at which he writes, the author only covertly expresses himself. One feels that he is afraid to compromise the bearer of his letter and those for whom it is destined. A weight of sorrow seems to oppress him; his secret anguish is revealed both by slight and by deep traces.

God, after having formerly communicated his will to men by the mouths of the prophets, has, in these latter days, availed himself of the medium of the Son by whom he created the world, and who fulfils all his message. This Son, the reflection of the Father's glory and impressed with his essence, whom the Father has been pleased to constitute heir of the universe, has expiated the sins of men by his appearance in this world, and has then departed to sit in heaven at the right hand of Majesty, with a rank higher than that of the angels. The Mosaic Law was promulgated by the angels, it contained but the shadow of the good things to come; ours has been first announced by the Lord, and has then been transmitted to us by the certain agency of those who heard it from his lips, God lending support to their testimony by signs, wonders, and all manner of miracles, as well as by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thanks to Jesus, all men have been made sons of God. Moses was a servant, Jesus, the Son. Above all, Jesus was pre-eminently the high priest of the order of Melchisedek.

This order is far superior to the Levitical priesthood, and has entirely abrogated it. Jesus is its priest for eternity.

For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily,

like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. . . . For the law appointeth men high priests, having infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was after the law, appointeth a Son, perfected for evermore. . . . We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched . . . Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come . . . if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works. . . . And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant. . . . For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it. For a testament is of force where there hath been death: for doth it ever avail while he that made it liveth? Wherefore even the first covenant hath not been dedicated without blood. . . . And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission.<sup>1</sup>

We are then sanctified once and for all by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, who will appear a second time to save such as await him. The ancient sacrifices never attained their aim since they were repeated incessantly. If the expiatory sacrifice recurred each year on a fixed day, was not this a proof that the blood of the victims was powerless? In place of these perpetual holocausts, Jesus has offered his unique sacrifice, which renders the others useless. In this way there can no longer be any question of sacrifice for sin. Apprehension of the dangers which surround the Church fills the author; before his eyes he has only a perspective of tortures; he thinks of the torments endured by the prophets and the martyrs of Antioch. The faith of several has fallen away, and the author is very severe in commenting on these lapses.

For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh oft

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews vii. 26-27, 28; viii. 1, 2; ix. 11, 13-15, 16-18, 22.

upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receiveth blessing from God: but if it beareth thorns and thistles, it is rejected and nigh unto a curse; whose end is to be burned. . . . God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye shewed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister. And we desire that each one of you may shew the same diligence unto the fulness of hope even to the end: that ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the faithful already showed negligence in attending meetings at the church. The apostle declares that these gatherings are the very essence of Christianity, that they promote mutual exhortation, encouragement, and watchfulness, and that so much the more zeal should be felt, seeing that the great day of the final coming is at hand.

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgement, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries. . . . It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were enlightened, ye endured a great conflict of sufferings; partly, being made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, becoming partakers with them that were so used. For ye both had compassion on them that were in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions, knowing that ye yourselves have a better possession and an abiding one. Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise.

For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry.<sup>2</sup>

Faith sums up the Christian's attitude. Faith is the firm expectation of what has been promised, the certainty of what one has not seen. It was faith which made the great men of the ancient dispensation who died without having obtained the promised things, having only seen and greeted them from afar, who confessed themselves strangers of fleeting sojourn on the earth, ever in quest of a better land, which they did not find, that of heaven. On this subject the author quotes the examples of Abel, Enoch,

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews vi. 4-8, 10-12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* x. 26, 27, 31-37.



Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab the harlot.

And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens . . . were tortured, not accepting their deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, evil entreated (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth. And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, . . . run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. . . . Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.<sup>1</sup>

The author then proceeds to explain to the believers that the sufferings which they endure are not punishments, but that they must be taken as paternal chastenings, such as a father administers to his son in token of his affection. He asks them to be on their guard against profane souls who, following Esau's example, would give up their heavenly birthright in exchange for a worldly and temporary advantage. For the third time the author recurs to his favourite thought that after any backsliding, which has put you out of Christianity, there is no return. Esau, too, sought to regain the paternal benediction, but his tears and regrets were unavailing. One feels that, in the persecution of 64, there were some who, by reason of weakness, denied their faith and now, after their apostasy, desired to return to the Church. Our doctor wishes them to be repudiated. What blindness, indeed, equals that of the Christian who hesitates or abjures after having 'come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews xi. 32-40; xii. 1, 2, 4.



innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel?'<sup>1</sup>

The apostle concludes by reminding his readers of the members of the Church who are still in Roman dungeons, and, above all, of the memory of their spiritual leaders who are no more, of those great pioneers who have preached to them the word of God, whose death has been a triumph for the faith. Let them consider the end of these holy lives, and they will gain new strength. Let them beware of false doctrines, above all of those which make holiness consist in useless ritual practices, such as distinctions in meats. In this the disciple or friend of St. Paul is to be discovered. Truth to say, the whole epistle is, like all Paul's epistles, a lengthy demonstration of the complete abrogation of the Mosaic law by Jesus. To bear the reproach laid on Jesus; to go forth from the world, 'for we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come';<sup>2</sup> to obey ecclesiastical superiors, to be full of respect for them, to make their task light and agreeable, 'for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account,'<sup>3</sup> all this as concerning practice. There is, perhaps, no writing which better exhibits than this the mystical rôle of Jesus waxing greater and greater, and ending in the complete absorption of the Christian consciousness. Not only is Jesus the *Logos* which has created the world, but his blood is the universal propitiation, the seal of a new covenant. The author is so pre-occupied with Jesus, that he makes mistakes in reading in order to find him everywhere. In his Greek manuscript of the Psalms, the two letters TI of the word ΩΤΙΑ in Psalm xl. 6, were a little doubtful; in them he has seen an M, and, as the preceding word ends with a Σ, he has read σῶμα, which supplies the fine Messianic reading: 'Sacrifice and offering thou

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews xii. 22-24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xiii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* xiii. 17.

wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me. . . .  
Then said I, Lo, I am come.<sup>1</sup>

A singular development indeed! The death of Jesus thus acquired, in the school of Paul, an importance far greater than his life. The precepts given at the Lake of Gennesareth had little interest for this school which apparently was scarcely acquainted with them; what it saw in the foreground was the sacrifice of the Son of God immolating himself for the expiation of the sins of the world. Strange ideas which, later, revived in all their rigour by Calvinism, were to make Christian theology gravely deviate from the primitive evangelical ideal! The Synoptic Gospels, which form the truly divine part of Christianity, are not the work of the school of Paul. We shall soon see them born of the small and gentle band which, in Judæa, still retained the true traditions of the life and personality of Jesus.

But what is admirable in the origins of Christianity is, that those who most obstinately drew the chariot in the wrong direction were those who, in reality, worked best for its advance. The Epistle to the Hebrews definitely marks, in the history of the religious evolution of mankind, the disappearance of sacrifice, in other words, of that which, up till then, had formed the essence of religion. For the primitive man the god is a very powerful being, who must either be appeased or corrupted. Sacrifice was due to fear or interest. To win over the god he was offered a gift capable of touching him, a fine piece of meat, some good kitchen stuff, or a cup of *soma* or wine. Plagues and diseases being regarded as the blows of an incensed deity, it was imagined that by substituting another person for those threatened, the wrath of the higher being might be averted; perhaps even, men said to themselves, the god would be contented with an animal if the beast were good, useful, and innocent. The god was judged on the model of a man, and, just as even now in certain parts of the East and of Africa, the native thinks he will gain a stranger's

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews x. 5, 7.

favour by slaying a sheep at his feet, and letting the blood flow over his shoes, while the flesh serves for his food, it was supposed that the supernatural being must appreciate the offering of an object, especially if by such an offering the maker of the sacrifice denied himself something. Up till the great revolution worked by the prophets in the eighth century before Christ, the idea of sacrifices was not much more refined among the Israelites than among other races. A new era begins with Isaiah crying in the name of Jehovah: 'Your sacrifices disgust me; what matter to me your he-goats and she-goats?' On the day when he wrote these splendid lines (about 740 B.C.) Isaiah was the true founder of Christianity. On that day it was decided that of the two functionaries who were rivals for the respect of the ancient tribes, the hereditary sacrificial priest and the sorcerer, the man of free inspiration who was believed to be the depositary of divine secrets, it was the latter who should resolve the future of religion. The sorcerer of the Semitic tribes, the *nabi*, became the 'prophet,' a sacred tribune devoted to the progress of social equity; and, while the sacrificial agent (the priest) continued to vaunt the efficacy of the slaughters by which he profited, the prophet dared to proclaim that the true God was much more concerned with justice and pity than with all the oxen in the world. Commanded, however, by ancient rules of ritual, which it was not easy to disregard, and maintained by the influence of the priests, sacrifices remained a law of ancient Israel. About the time with which we are occupied, and even before the destruction of the third Temple, the importance of these rites was declining. The dispersion of the Jews led to functions which could only be accomplished at Jerusalem being regarded as matters of secondary consideration. Philo had proclaimed that worship consisted, above all else, of pious hymns to be sung with the heart rather than with the voice; he dared to assert that such prayers were of greater worth than offerings. The Essenes professed the same doctrine. St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, declares that religion is a creed of pure reason.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, by developing the theory that Jesus is the true High Priest, and that his death has been a sacrifice abrogating all others, was the final death-blow to blood-stained immolations. The Christians, even those of Jewish origin, ceased more and more to believe themselves bound to the sacrifices prescribed by law, or only lent themselves to them by condescension. The generating idea of the Mass, the belief that Jesus renews himself in the eucharistic rite, is already visible, but as yet only obscurely and afar off.

## CHAPTER X

### THE REVOLUTION IN JUDÆA

THE state of exaltation through which the Christian imagination was passing, was soon complicated by the events which were taking place in Judæa. These events seemed to confirm the visions of the most frenzied minds. An attack of fever, which can only be compared with that which seized on France during the Revolution and on Paris in 1871, took possession of the entire Jewish nation. These 'divine diseases,' before which ancient medicine confessed itself powerless, seemed to have become the normal temperament of the Jewish people. It might have been said, that, decided on going to extremes, it wished to touch the very limits of human nature. During four years the strange race, which seems created equally to defy him who blesses and him who curses it, was in a state of convulsion, in face of which the historian, divided between admiration and horror, has to halt respectfully as before all that is mysterious.

The causes of this crisis were of ancient date, and the crisis itself was inevitable. The Mosaic Law, the work of Utopian enthusiasts possessed by an enthralling, socialistic ideal, the least political of men, took, like Islam, no account of a civil society parallel to religious society. This Law, which seems to have reached the stage of compilation in which we read it in the seventh century before Christ, would have made the little kingdom of David's descendants fly to pieces, even apart from the Assyrian conquest. Since the preponderance had been won by the prophetic element, the

kingdom of Judæa, at enmity with all its neighbours, constantly raging against Tyre, on terms of hatred with Edom, Moab, and Ammon, was no longer capable of existence. A nation which devotes itself to religious and social problems is lost in politics. On the day when Israel became 'a peculiar treasure, unto [God] . . . a kingdom of priests, an holy nation,'<sup>1</sup> it was decreed that it should not be a people like others. One cannot have a plurality of contradictory destinies; a point of excellence is always expiated by some feature of abasement. The Empire of Achæmenes gave Israel a little repose. This great feudal power, tolerant towards all provincial diversities, and greatly resembling the caliphate of Bagdad and the Ottoman Empire, was the state under whose rule the Jews found themselves most at ease. The Ptolemaic dominion, in the third century before Christ, seems, to the same extent, to have been fairly well adapted to them. Such was not the case with the Seleucides. Antioch had become a centre for active Hellenic propaganda; Antiochus Epiphanes believed himself bound to erect everywhere, as the token of his power, the image of the Olympian Jupiter. It was then that the first great Jewish revolt against secular civilisation burst forth. Israel had patiently endured the disappearance of its political existence after the time of Nebuchadnezzar; it no longer kept within bounds when it perceived that its religious institutions were in danger. A race which normally had little military genius was seized with a fit of heroism; without a regular army, without generals, without tactical skill, it vanquished the Seleucides, maintained its revealed right, and created for itself a second period of autonomy. The Asmonæan dynasty was, nevertheless, constantly being undermined by serious inward vices, and only lasted for a century. The Jewish people's destiny was not to constitute a separate nationality; that people ever dreams of things international; its ideal is not the city, it is the synagogue, it is the free congregation. The same applies to Islam, which has created an immense empire, but

<sup>1</sup> Exodus xix. 5, 6.



has destroyed all nationality among the peoples it has subjugated, and leaves them none other fatherland than the mosque and the *zaouia*.

To such a social state the name of theocracy is often applied, and rightly, if it be intended to express that the profound conception of the Semitic religions and the empires which have sprung therefrom is that of the kingship of God, regarded as the one and only master of the world and the universal suzerain; but among these peoples theocracy is not synonymous with priestly domination. The priest, strictly as such, plays but a slight part in the history of Judaism and Islamism. Power belongs to the representative of God, to him whom God inspires, to the prophet, the holy man, to him who has received his mission from heaven and proves it by miracle or success. In default of the prophet, power belongs to the writer of apocalyptic and apocryphal books attributed to ancient prophets, or it may be to the doctor who interprets the divine law, to the head of the synagogue, more still to the family chief who watches over the depository of the law, and hands it on to his children. A civil power or a monarchy has not much to do with such a social organization. This organization never exercises its functions better than when the individuals owing it allegiance are scattered, with the status of tolerated aliens, over a great empire in which uniformity does not reign. It is in the nature of Judaism to be subordinate, since it is powerless to derive from itself any principle of military power. The same state of things is to be noted in the Greeks of our own days; the Greek communities of Trieste, Smyrna, and Constantinople are much more flourishing than the little kingdom of Greece, because these communities are free from the necessity for the political agitation in which a race of quick sensibility, in premature possession of liberty, finds its certain ruin.

The Roman sovereignty established in Judæa in 63 B.C. by the arms of Pompey, at first seemed to realise some of the conditions of Jewish life. Rome, at this epoch, had not, as her rule, the assimilation of the countries which she

successively annexed to her vast Empire. She deprived them of the right of declaring peace and war, but otherwise scarcely arrogated to herself anything save the right of arbitration on great political questions. Under the degenerate survivors of the Asmonæan dynasty and under the Herods, the Jewish nation retained this semi-independence which ought to have sufficed it, seeing that its religious affairs were respected. But the internal passion of the people was too strong. Beyond a certain degree of religious fanaticism, man is ungovernable. It must also be said that Rome constantly tended to render her power more effective in the East. The little vassal principalities, which at first she had permitted to remain, disappeared from day to day, and the provinces grew to be purely and simply portions of the Empire. From the year 6 A.D., Judæa was governed by procurators, subordinate to the imperial legates of Syria, and having at their side the parallel power of the Herods. The impossibility of such a *régime* became daily more apparent. The Herods were held in small consideration in the East by really patriotic and religious men. The administrative customs of the Romans, even what was most reasonable in them, were hated by the Jews. In general, the Romans displayed the greatest condescension towards the pedantic scruples of the nation, but this was not sufficient; things had come to such a pass that it was impossible to do anything without infringing on a canonical question. Absolute religions, like Islamism and Judaism, do not suffer their power to be shared. If they do not reign supreme, they proclaim themselves persecuted. If they feel themselves under protection, they become exacting and seek to make life impossible to the other religious sects around them. This is to be seen in Algeria, where the Israelites, knowing that they are supported against the Mussulmans, are growing insupportable to the latter, and incessantly display their arrogance in recriminations.

Certainly, we wish to believe that in this hundred years' experiment in living together made by the Romans and the

Jews, which resulted in so terrible an upheaval, wrongs were reciprocated. Several procurators were unjust men, while others may have been brusque, harsh, and apt to be impatient with a religion which irritated them, and the future of which they did not understand. It would have been necessary to be perfect, not to feel exasperated with this narrow and haughty spirit, inimical to Greek and Roman civilisation, malignant towards the rest of the human race, which superficial observers held to be the essence of a Jew. What, besides, could an administrator think of the people whom he administered being constantly occupied in making accusations against him at the imperial court, and in forming factions to oppose him even when he was entirely in the right? In this deep hatred, which for more than two thousand years has existed between the Jewish race and the rest of the world, which side was first in the wrong? Such a question ought not to be asked. In matters of this kind all is action and reaction; cause and effect. These exclusions, *ghetto* isolations, distinctive costumes are unjust; but who were the first to desire them? Those who believed themselves defiled by contact with pagans, those who sought for themselves separation, a society apart. Fanaticism created the chains, and the chains have redoubled fanaticism. Hatred engenders hatred, and there is but one way of escape from the vicious circle—that of suppressing the cause of hatred, those injurious separations which, at first desired and sought by the sects, afterwards became their opprobrium. As regards Judaism, modern France has solved the problem. By razing all the barriers which surrounded the Israelite, she has deprived Judaism of its narrow and exclusive elements, that is to say, of its practices and sequestered life, to such good effect that a Jewish family transferred to Paris, almost ceases to live a Jewish life at the end of one or two generations.

It would be unjust to reproach the Romans of the first century with not having acted similarly. There was an absolute opposition between the Roman Empire and orthodox Judaism. It was the Jews who most often were

insolent, troublesome, aggressive. The idea of a system of common equity, which the Romans bore with them in germ, aroused antipathy in the strict observers of the *Thora*. The latter had moral needs in entire contradiction with a purely human society, possessing no theocratic element, like that of Rome. Rome founded the State; Judaism founded the Church. Rome created secular and rational government; the Jews inaugurated the kingdom of God. Between this narrow but fruitful theocracy and the most absolute proclamation of the temporal state which has ever been made, a conflict was inevitable. The Jews had their Law based on foundations entirely different from those of Roman equity, and in essence irreconcilable with that equity. Until they had had their pride cruelly crushed they could not be satisfied with simple toleration, they who believed they possessed the words of eternal life, the secret of the constitution of a just city. Their case was like that of the Algerian Mussulmans of the present day. Our state of society, although infinitely superior to their own, only inspires in them feelings of repugnance. Their revealed Law, at once civil and religious, fills them with pride and makes them incapable of lending their support to a philosophic legislation, founded on the simple theory of the relations between man and man. To this add a profound ignorance, which prevents fanatical sects from properly estimating the forces of the civilised world, and blinds them as to the issues of the war in which they engage with such light hearts.

One circumstance greatly contributed to keeping Judæa in a state of permanent hostility towards the Empire—the Jews took no share in military service. Everywhere else the legions were composed of the natives of the country, and it was thus that, with armies weak in numbers, the Romans held immense territories. The Roman soldier and the inhabitants of the land found in each other fellow-countrymen. Such was not the case in Judæa. The legions in occupation of the country were for the most part recruited at Cæsarea and Sebaste, which were anti-

Jewish towns. Thence resulted the impossibility of any understanding whatever between the army and the people. The Roman power was at Jerusalem hemmed within its entrenchments, and, so to speak, in a permanent state of siege.

The feelings entertained by the different parts of the Jewish world towards the Romans were, however, far from being identical. With the exception of worldly people, like Tiberius Alexander, who had grown indifferent to their old faith and were regarded as renegades by their co-religionists, everyone disliked the foreign tyrants; but all were far from pushing matters to insurrection. In this respect four or five parties could be distinguished in Jerusalem:—

(1) The Sadducee and Herodian party, the remains of the house of Herod and its followers, the great families of Hanan and Boëthus in possession of the priesthood; a world of epicureans and pleasure-loving sceptics, hated by the populace because of its pride, its lack of devotion and its wealth. This party, essentially conservative in instinct, secured in the Roman occupation a guarantee of its interests, and, without having any affection for the Romans, was strongly opposed to all revolution.

(2) The bourgeois Pharisee party, an honest party composed of men of common sense and settled respectability, sober, steady, loving their religion, observing it strictly—even devout—but lacking in imagination, fairly well informed, knowing the outside world, and clearly perceiving that a revolt could only result in the destruction of nation and Temple. Josephus is the type of this class of persons, whose fate was that which ever seems reserved for moderate parties in times of revolution—powerlessness, versatility, and the supreme discomfort of having the reputation of traitors in the opinion of the majority.

(3) Enthusiasts of every kind: Zelotes, Sicarii, assassins, a strange medley of mendicant fanatics, reduced by the injustice and violence of the Sadducees to the lowest depths of misery, regarding themselves as the only heirs of the promises of Israel, of that 'poor man' beloved of



God; finding nurture in prophetic books, violent apocalypses, such as those of Enoch, believing that the kingdom was about to be revealed, and, in short, possessed by the most intense exaltation recorded in history.

(4) Brigands, vagrants, adventurers, dangerous *palikarii*, the fruit of the complete social disorganisation of the country; these people who, for the most part, were of Idumæan or Nabathæan origin, took little interest in the religious question, but they were fomenters of disorder, and, quite naturally, were in alliance with the enthusiast faction.

(5) Pious dreamers: Essenes, Christians, *Ebionim*, tranquilly awaiting the kingdom of God, devout men gathered around the Temple, praying and weeping. The disciples of Jesus were of this number, but they were still of such small account in the public eye that Josephus does not count them among the forces engaged in the strife. One sees at the outset how, in the hour of danger, these holy men could do nothing but flee. The spirit of Jesus, full of a divine efficacy for taking man away from the world and giving him consolation, could not inspire the narrow patriotism which makes Sicarii and heroes.

The enthusiasts were naturally to be the arbiters of the situation. In them the democratic and revolutionary side of Judaism took an alarming form. They were convinced, like Judas the Gaulonite, that all power comes from evil, that monarchy is a work of Satan (a theory which sovereigns such as Caligula and Nero, true demons incarnate, only too well justified), and they let themselves be cut in pieces rather than give another than God the name of master. Following in the footsteps of Mattathias, first of the Zelotes, who, seeing a Jew sacrifice to idols, slew him, they avenged God with the dagger. The very fact of hearing an uncircumcised person speak of God or the Law was sufficient for them to seek to surprise him alone; then they gave him the choice of circumcision or death. Executing those mysterious sentences which were left to the 'hand of heaven,' and believing themselves bound to carry out the formidable penalty of excommunication, which was equiva-



lent to outlawry and death, they formed an army of terrorists in the full ferment of revolution. It might have been foreseen that these men of confused mind, incapable of distinguishing their gross appetites from passions which their frenzy represented to them as holy, would go to the last excesses, and would stop at no degree of madness.

The popular mind was under the influence of a kind of permanent hallucination; terrifying rumours spread on all sides. Men thought of nothing but omens; the apocalyptic colour of the Jewish imagination tinged all with a halo of blood. Comets, swords in the heavens, self-kindled lights burning by night in the depths of the sanctuary, victims engendering at the moment of sacrifice unnatural offspring — of all this people spoke to one another in accents of terror. One day it was the enormous brazen gates of the Temple which had opened of themselves and refused to shut. At the Passover of the year 65, about three hours after midnight, the Temple was, for the space of half an hour, all illuminated as with the light of day, and spectators imagined that its interior was being consumed. On another occasion, the day of Pentecost, the priests heard the sound of several persons inside the sanctuary apparently making preparations for removal, and saying to one another, 'Let us go hence! Let us go hence!' All this was only related when it was too late; but the serious mental uneasiness which was generally felt was the most significant indication that something extraordinary was in preparation.

It was, above all, the Messianic prophecies which inspired the populace with an imperative craving for agitation. When a nation attributes to itself the monarchy of the future, it does not resign itself to a mediocre destiny. For the multitude, the Messianic theories were comprised in an oracle said to be derived from the scriptures, according to which a prince, who should be master of the universe, was to arise in Judæa about this time. It is useless to reason against obstinate hope; evidence is powerless in contending with the chimera which a people has embraced with its whole heart.

Gessius Florus of Clazomenes had succeeded Albinus as procurator of Judæa about the end of 64 or the beginning of 65. He was, by all accounts, a rather wicked man, and he owed the position which he occupied to the influence of his wife Cleopatra, who was a friend of Poppæa. The animosity between him and the Jews soon reached the last stage of exasperation. The Jews had become unbearable to him by reason of their irritability, their habit of complaining about trifles, and their lack of respect for the civil and military authorities; but apparently, on his side, he took a pleasure in ostentatiously defying them. On May 16th and 17th of the year 64, there were collisions between his troops and the Hierosolymites on somewhat frivolous grounds. Florus retired to Cæsarea, leaving only a cohort in the tower of Antonia. This was a highly reprehensible act. An armed power owes it to a city which it occupies, and in which a popular revolt breaks out, not to abandon it to its own passions until all means of resistance have been exhausted. Had Florus remained in the city, it is highly improbable that the Hierosolymites would have forced it, and all the misfortunes which followed would have been avoided. Florus once gone, it was fated that the Roman army would only enter Jerusalem again through fire and death.

The retreat of Florus was, however, far from creating an open-rupture between the city and the Roman authority. Agrippa II. and Berenice were at that moment at Jerusalem. Agrippa made conscientious efforts to calm men's minds; all those of moderate views took his part; advantage was even taken of the popularity of Berenice in whom the popular imagination saw, alive once more, her great-grandmother Mariamne the Asmonæan. While Agrippa harangued the crowd in the *xystos*, the princess showed herself on the terrace of the palace of the Asmonæans which overlooked it. All was of no avail. Thoughtful men pointed out that the war would mean the certain ruin of the nation; they were treated as people of little faith. Agrippa, in discouragement or alarm, left the city and retired to his

domain of Batanæa. A band of the most ardent spirits set off at once, and captured by surprise the fortress of Masada, situated on the shore of the Dead Sea, at two days' journey from Jerusalem, and almost impregnable.

Here there was an unmistakable act of hostility. In Jerusalem the struggle grew fiercer day by day between the party of peace and that of war. The former of these two parties was composed of men of wealth, who had everything to lose in the event of an upheaval; the second comprised, besides sincere enthusiasts, that mass of the proletariat to which a national crisis, by superseding the ordinary conditions of life, is profitable in more than one way. The moderates sought support from the little Roman garrison which was quartered in the tower of Antonia. The high priest was an obscure man, Matthias, son of Theophilus. Since the deposition of Hanan the younger, who had caused the death of James, it was apparently no longer the custom to select the high priest from the powerful sacerdotal families of Hanan, Cantheras, or Boëthus. But the real head of the priestly party was the former high priest Ananus, son of Nebedee, a wealthy and energetic man, who had little popularity because of the pitiless rigour with which he maintained his rights, and was especially hated owing to the insolence and rapacity of his lackeys. By a singular coincidence, by no means rare in times of revolution, the leader of the party of action was none other than Eleazar, son of this same Ananus. He occupied the important post of captain of the Temple. His religious enthusiasm seems to have been sincere. Carrying to extremes the principle that sacrifices could only be offered by Jews and for Jews, he put a stop to the prayers offered for the Emperor and for the prosperity of Rome. All the younger part of the populace was full of ardour. It is one of the features of the fanaticism inspired by the Semitic religions, that it shows itself with most zeal among young people. The members of the old priestly families, the Pharisees and reasonable men of some standing, saw the danger. Authorised doctors were put forward, rabbinical consulta-

tions were held, treatises on canonical law drawn up, for the most part in vain, since it was evident that the lower clergy was already making common cause with the enthusiasts and Eleazar.

The higher clergy and the aristocracy, despairing of making any impression on a popular mass ready to listen to the most superficial suggestions, sent beseeching Florus and Agrippa to come and crush the revolt at the earliest possible moment, pointing out to them that it would soon be too late. Florus, according to Josephus, desired a war of extermination, which should ensure the disappearance of the entire Jewish race from the earth; he abstained from replying. Agrippa sent the party of order a force of three thousand Arab cavalry, and with these cavalry the latter occupied the upper city (now the Armenian quarter and the Jewish quarter). The lower part of the city and the Temple (now the Mussulman quarter, the Mogharibi, and the Haram) were occupied by the party of action. A veritable war broke out between the two parts of the city. On August 14th, the revolutionaries commanded by Eleazar and Menahem, son of that Judas the Gaulonite, who first, sixty years before, had excited the Jews to revolt by preaching that the true worshipper of God ought to recognise no man as his superior, took the upper town by storm and burnt the house of Ananus and the palaces of Agrippa and Berenice. Agrippa's troopers, his brother, and all the aristocrats who could join them, took refuge in the highest part of the palace of the Asmonæans. On the day following this success the insurgents attacked the tower of Antonia, captured it in two days, and set it on fire. They then laid siege to the upper palace and took it by assault on September 6th. Agrippa's cavalry were allowed to go free. As to the Romans, they shut themselves up in the three towers called after Hippicus, Phasaël, and Mariamne. Ananus and his brother were slain. As generally happens in popular movements, discord soon broke out among the chiefs of the victorious faction. Menahem made himself insupportable by his pride as a

democrat who had risen from the ranks. Eleazar, son of Ananus, no doubt irritated by the assassination of his father, pursued and slew him; the remnant of Menahem's party took refuge at Masada, which, until the close of the war, was to be the stronghold of the most fanatical section of the zealots.

The Romans defended themselves in their towers for a long time. Reduced to extremity, they only asked for *qua ter*. It was promised to them, but, as soon as they had surrendered their arms, Eleazar had them all put to death with the exception of Metilius, *primipilus* of the cohort, who pledged his word that he would be circumcised. Thus Jerusalem was lost by the Romans about the end of September 66, a little more than a hundred years after its capture by Pompey. The Roman garrison of the castle of Machero, fearing lest it should find its retreat cut off, capitulated. The castle of Kypros, which overlooked Jericho, also fell into the insurgents' hands. It is probable that Herodium was occupied by the rebels about the same time. The weakness exhibited by the Romans in all these encounters is somewhat singular, and gives a certain colour to the opinion of Josephus, according to which the scheme of Florus was to push everything to extremes. It is true that the first outbursts of a revolution have a certain fascination which causes it to be very difficult to arrest their progress, and makes wise minds prefer to let them exhaust themselves by their own excesses.

In five months the insurrectionary party had succeeded in acquiring a formidable position. Not only was it in possession of the city of Jerusalem, but, reaching across the desert of Judah, it found itself in communication with the Dead Sea region, of which it occupied all the fortresses; thence it held out its hand to the Arabs and Nabathæans, who were more or less hostile to Rome. Judæa, Idumæa, Peræa and Galilee were all for the rebels. At Rome, meanwhile, a hateful sovereign was engaged in handing over the imperial functions to the most ignoble and incapable of his subjects. Had the Jews been able to gather

around them all the malcontents of the East, short work would have been made of Roman dominion in these regions. But, unfortunately for them, the result was quite the contrary; their revolt filled the populations of Syria with a redoubled fidelity towards the Empire. The hatred which they had inspired in their neighbours sufficed, during the Roman power's temporary paralysis, to excite against them foes not less formidable than the legions.



## CHAPTER XI

### MASSACRES IN SYRIA AND EGYPT

A KIND of general watchword in fact seems, at this epoch, to have run through the East, provoking everywhere great massacres of Jews. The incompatibility of Jewish life and Græco-Roman life grew wider and wider. Each of the two races wished to exterminate the other; between them there was apparently no mercy. To imagine these conflicts, it is necessary to understand to what degree Judaism had entered into the whole of the Eastern portion of the Roman Empire. 'They have invaded all cities,' says Strabo, 'and it is not easy to mention one place in the world which has not received this tribe or, rather, been occupied by it. Egypt, Cyrenaica, and many other countries have adopted their customs, scrupulously observing their precepts and deriving great profit from the adoption of their natural laws. They have legal permission to reside in Egypt, and a great part of the town of Alexandria is assigned to them; there they have their own ethnarch who looks after their affairs, administers justice, watches over the execution of contracts and wills, as though he were the governor of an independent state.' This contiguity of two elements, as opposed to one another as fire and water, could not fail to bring about the most terrible explosions.

There is no reason to suspect the Roman government of having been implicated; similar massacres took place among the Parthians whose situation and interests differed entirely from those of the West. It is one of the glories of Rome to have established her Empire on peace, on the extinction

of local wars, and never to have practised the detestable method of government, one of the political secrets of the Turkish Empire, which consists in exciting the diverse populations of mixed countries against one another. As to massacre for religious motives, never was there an idea more remote from the Roman spirit; foreign to all theology, the Roman did not understand sectarianism, and could not admit the possibility of division for so trifling a matter as a speculative proposition. Hatred of the Jews was, moreover, so generally diffused a feeling in the ancient world that there was no need to spur it. This hatred marks one of the trenches of separation which, perhaps, will never be filled up in the human species. It is due to something more than race; it is the hatred of the different functions of human society, of the man of peace contented with his home pleasures against the man of war, of the man of the shop and the counting-house against the peasant and the noble. It cannot be without reason that poor Israel has spent its life as a people in being massacred. When all nations and all ages have persecuted you, there must be some motive behind it all. The Jew, up to our own time, insinuated himself everywhere, claiming the protection of the common law; but, in reality, remaining outside the common law. He retained his own status; he wished to have the same guarantees as everyone else, and, over and above that, his own exceptions and special laws. He desired the advantages of the nations without being a nation, without helping to bear the burdens of the nations. No people has ever been able to tolerate this. The nations are military creations founded and maintained by the sword; they are the work of peasants and soldiers; towards establishing them the Jews have contributed nothing. Herein is the great fallacy inspired in Israelite pretensions. The tolerated alien can be useful to a country, but only on condition that the country does not allow itself to be invaded by him. It is not fair to claim family rights in a house which one has not built, like those birds which come and take up their quarters in a nest which does not belong

to them, or like the crustaceans which steal the shell of another species.

The Jew has rendered the world so many good and so many bad services, that he will never have justice shown him. We owe him too much and, at the same time, see his faults too clearly, not to be provoked at the sight of him. This eternal Jeremiah, this 'man of sorrows,' for ever bemoaning his lot, bowing his back to the lash with an irritating patience, this creature, foreign to all our instincts of honour, pride, glory, delicacy, and art, lacking so greatly in the military and the chivalrous spirit, who loves neither Greece, nor Rome, nor Germany, and to whom, nevertheless, we owe our religion to such a degree that the Jew has a right to say to the Christian, 'Thou art a Jew of base metal,'—this being, I say, has been set up as the end to which contradiction and antipathy have converged, a fruitful antipathy which has proved one of the conditions of human progress. It seems as though, in the first century of our era, the world had a dim consciousness of what was in progress. It beheld its master in this awkward, susceptible, timid alien, without external show of nobility, but honest, moral, persevering, upright in business, dowered with modest virtues, no soldier but a good merchant, a cheerful and steady workman. The Jewish family, illumined with hope, and the synagogue in which life lived in common was full of charm, inspired envy. So much humility, so tranquil an acceptance of persecution and insult, such resignation in winning consolation in family and church, for not being among the great ones of the earth, a gentle gaiety like that which, in our own days, characterises the non-Mussulman subject of the Turkish Empire, and causes him to find his good fortune in his very inferiority in that little world where his happiness is in proportion to the persecution and ignominy he suffers without,—all this inspired aristocratic antiquity with fits of deep malignancy which, at times, culminated in abominable deeds of brutality.

The storm began to mutter at Cæsarea almost at the very moment at which the revolutionary party had succeeded

in completely making themselves masters of Jerusalem. Cæsarea was the town in which the relative position of Jews and non-Jews (the latter comprised under the general name of Syrians) presented most difficulties. In the Syrian towns of mixed population, the Jews formed the wealthy body among the inhabitants; but this wealth, as we have pointed out, was, in part, derived from an injustice, their exemption from military service. The Greeks and Syrians, from whom the legions were recruited, were wounded at seeing themselves outstripped by people exempt from the burdens of the state, who arrogated a privilege from the toleration which was shown them. There were perpetual conflicts, and endless complaints were made to the Roman magistrates. Orientals usually make religion a pretext for annoying other people; the least religious of men grow singularly pious when piety gives them a chance of molesting their neighbours; in our own days the Turkish functionaries are besieged with grievances of this description. From about the year 60 an unceasing warfare raged between the two sections of the Cæsarean population. Nero disposed of the questions at issue against the Jews, but hatred was only envenomed the more. Miserable attempts at petty vexation or, perhaps, inadvertences on the part of the Syrians, became crimes and insults in the eyes of the Jews. The young men proceeded from threats to blows; serious men complained to the Roman authorities, who, as a rule, had both parties bastinadoed. Gessius Florus was more humane; he began by making each side pay him, and then laughed at the litigants. A synagogue which had a party-wall, and a pitcher and some dead fowls found at the door of the synagogue, which the Jews tried to prove formed the remains of a pagan sacrifice, were the crying questions of the hour when Florus returned to Cæsarea, infuriated by the insult which he had suffered at the hands of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

When, some months later, it became known that these latter had entirely succeeded in turning the Romans out of their walls, excitement ran high. There was now open war

between the Jewish nation and the Romans, and the Syrians therefore concluded that they might massacre the Jews with impunity. In an hour's time twenty thousand were butchered; there did not remain a single survivor in Cæsarea; Florus, in fact, gave orders that all those who had escaped by flight should be seized and taken to the galleys. This crime provoked frightful reprisals. The Jews formed themselves into bands, and in their turn began to massacre the Syrians in the towns of Philadelphia, Hesbon, Gerasa, Pella and Scythopolis; they ravaged Decapolis and Gaulonitis, set fire to Sebaste and Ascalon, and laid Anthedon and Gaza in ruins. They burned the villages, slaying all who were not Jews. For their part the Syrians killed all the Jews whom they met. Southern Syria was a field of carnage; every town was divided into two armies which made pitiless war upon one another; the nights were spent in terror. There were episodes of peculiar atrocity. At Scythopolis, Jews fought with the pagan inhabitants against their co-religionary invaders, but this did not save them from being afterwards massacred by the Scythopolitans.

Jewish massacres commenced again with new violence at Ascalon, Acre, Tyre, Hippas and Gadara. Those who were not slain were cast into prison. The fanatical scenes which were then taking place at Jerusalem, caused men to see in every Jew a kind of dangerous madman, whose acts of fury it was necessary to prevent in time.

The epidemic of massacres spread as far as Egypt. Hatred of Jews and Greeks there reached its highest point. Alexandria was a half-Jewish city, in which the Jews formed a real self-governing republic. As a matter of fact, Egypt, for some months, had had as its prefect a Jew, Tiberius Alexander; but he was an apostate Jew, little inclined to be indulgent towards the fanaticism of his co-religionaries. It was in connection with a gathering in the amphitheatre that the sedition broke out. The first provocation apparently came from the Greeks, but the Jews replied to it in an atrocious manner. Arming themselves with torches,



they threatened to burn the Greeks in the amphitheatre to the last man. Tiberius Alexander in vain essayed to calm them. The legions had to be called out; the Jews resisted, the slaughter was terrible. The Jewish quarter in Alexandria, which was called the *Delta*, was literally encumbered with corpses; the number of deaths was estimated at fifty thousand.

These horrors lasted for about a month. They did not extend farther north than Tyre; for beyond that place the Jewish colonies were not large enough to be offensive to the native populations. The cause of the evil, indeed, was rather social than religious. In every city in which Judaism succeeded in being the predominant power, life became impossible to pagans. It can easily be understood that the success of the Jewish revolution during the summer of 66 caused temporary alarm in all the towns of mixed population in the neighbourhood of Palestine and Galilee. We have several times insisted on the singular fact, that in the Jewish people we have the extremes, and, if one may say so, the conflict of good and evil. There is no wickedness equal to Jewish wickedness; and yet Judaism has known how to derive from itself the ideal of goodness, sacrifice and love. The best of men have been Jews; the most malignant of men have also been Jews. It is indeed a strange race, marked in very truth with the seal of God, which has been capable of simultaneously producing, like two shoots from the same stem, the early Christian Church and the ferocious fanaticism of the revolutionaries of Jerusalem, Jesus and John of Gischala, the apostles and the Sicarian Zelotes, the Gospel and the Talmud! Can we wonder if this mysterious gestation was accompanied by anguish, delirium, and a fever such as had never before been known?

There can be no doubt that the Christians were, in more than one place, included in the massacres of September 66. It is probable, however, that the gentle demeanour and inoffensive character of these good sectaries often shielded them. The majority of the Christians in the Syrian towns



were what were called 'Judaizers'—that is to say, converted natives of the country, not Jews by race. They were looked on with mistrust, but no one dared to slay them; they were regarded as half-breeds, foreign to their native land. As to them, while they were passing through these terrible months, they kept their eyes fixed on heaven, believing that in every episode of the terrible storm they beheld the signs of the time appointed for the catastrophe.

Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors.<sup>1</sup>

The Roman government was, however, preparing to forcibly re-enter the city which it had imprudently abandoned. The imperial legate of Syria, Cestius Gallus, marched from Antioch towards the south with a large army. Agrippa joined him in the capacity of guide to the expedition; auxiliary troops, in whom hatred of the Jews compensated for lack of military training, were furnished by the towns. Cestus subjugated Galilee and the coast without much difficulty, and on October 24th arrived at Gibeon, six miles from Jerusalem.

With surprising audacity, the insurgents sallied forth to attack him in this position, and inflicted a check on him. Such a fact would be inconceivable if we imagined the Hierosolymite army to have been a disorderly mob of devotees, fanatical mendicants, and brigands. It possessed elements which were more solid and of really military quality:—Monobazus and Cenedæus, the two princes of the royal family of Adiabene, a certain Silas of Babylon, lieutenant of Agrippa II., who had thrown in his lot with the national party, Niger of Peræa, a practical soldier, and Simon, son of Gioras, who at that time was entering upon his career of violence and heroism. Agrippa believed the occasion a favourable one for negotiation. Two of his emissaries came to promise the Hierosolymites a free

<sup>1</sup> Matthew xxiv. 32, 33.

pardon if they would surrender. A large proportion of the population desired acceptance of these terms, but the enthusiasts slew the emissaries and maltreated some persons who were indignant at such a crime. This division in the camp gave Cestius a momentary advantage. He left Gibeon, and moved his camp to the place called *Sapha* or *Scopus*, an important post situated a very short distance to the north of Jerusalem, from which the city and the Temple could be seen. There he remained for three days waiting intelligence from his agents in the place. On the fourth day, October 30th, he ranged his army in battle array and advanced. The party which wished to prolong resistance abandoned the whole of the new town, and fell back on the central parts of the city (upper and lower) and on the Temple. Cestius entered without opposition, occupied the new town, the Bezetha quarter, and the wood-market, which he set on fire, reached the upper part of the city, and drew up his forces before the Asmonæan palace.

Josephus asserts that, had Cestius Gallus made an immediate assault, the war would have been at an end. The Jewish historian explains the Roman general's inaction by intrigues, the principal motive for which must have been the money of Florus. It appears that on the walls could be seen members of the aristocratic party, led by one of the Hanans, who called for Cestius and offered to open the gates to him. No doubt the legate feared some ambush. For five days he vainly attempted to force the walls. On the sixth day (November 5th), he at last attacked the Temple enclosure on its northern side. The conflict under the porticoes was terrible; discouragement seized the rebels, and the peace party was preparing to receive Cestius, when the latter suddenly sounded a retreat. If the narrative of Josephus is correct, the conduct of Cestius is inexplicable. Perhaps Josephus, to support his argument, exaggerates the advantages which Cestius at first won over the Jews, and minimizes the real strength of the resistance. What is certain is, that Cestius returned to his camp at Scopus and departed next day for Gibeon, harassed by the

Jews. Two days after (November 8th) he decamped, pursued all the way to the slopes of Bethoran, abandoned the whole of his baggage, and, not without difficulty, found refuge at Antipatus. The incapacity shown by Cestius in this campaign is truly surprising. The misgovernment of Nero must have degraded all the services of the state for such events to have been possible. Cestius, however, survived his defeat a very short time; many attributed his death to grief. What became of Florus is unknown.

## CHAPTER XII

### VESPASIAN IN GALILEE—THE REIGN OF TERROR AT JERUSALEM—FLIGHT OF THE CHRISTIANS

WHILE in the East the Roman Empire was suffering outrage of the most sanguinary kind, Nero, tossed from crime to crime, from folly to folly, was given over entirely to his pretentious delusions of being an artist. All that could be called taste, tact, and politeness had disappeared from his circle with Petronius. A colossal vanity gave him a burning thirst to monopolise the glory of the whole world; his resentment against those who took up the attention of the public was ferocious; to be successful in anything whatever became an act of treason against the state; it is said that he wished to prohibit the sale of Lucan's works. He aspired to unheard-of forms of celebrity; in his mind he resolved imposing projects—piercing the isthmus of Corinth, a canal from Baia to Ostia, the discovery of the sources of the Nile. A journey to Greece had for a long time been his dream, not from a serious desire to see the masterpieces of an incomparable art, but from his grotesque ambition to compete at the trials of skill held at the different towns and carry off the prizes. These competitions were literally innumerable; the foundation of such games had been one of the forms of Greek liberality; for every citizen who had acquired a little wealth considered it, as we see now in the foundation of our academical prizes, a certain means of handing down his name to the future. The noble exercises which so powerfully contributed to the strength and beauty of the ancient race, and formed the school of Greek art, had become, as

did later the tournaments of the Middle Ages, a field for professional players who made a business of running in the *agones* and winning crowns. Instead of good and handsome citizens, only odious and useless coxcombs or people who took up a lucrative specialty were to be seen taking part. These prizes, which the winner displayed as a kind of decoration, kept the conceited Cæsar from sleeping; he already pictured himself returning to Rome in triumph with the extremely rare title of *periodonice*, or victor throughout the complete cycle of the sacred games.

His mania for being a public singer reached the extreme of madness. One of the reasons for the death of Thræase was that he did not sacrifice to the 'divine voice' of the Emperor. Before the King of the Parthians, his guest, he only wished to obtain consideration by showing off his talent for chariot racing. Lyrical dramas were produced, in which he played the principal part, and in which the gods, goddesses, heroes, and heroines were masked and draped to resemble him and the woman whom he loved. He thus played Œdipus, Thyestes, Hercules, Alcmaeon, Orestes, and Canace; he was seen on the stage fettered (with golden chains), guided as a blind man, imitating a madman, acting the part of a woman in child-birth. One of his latest projects was to appear at the theatre nude, in the character of Hercules, crushing a lion in his arms, or slaying it with a club; the lion was, it is said, already chosen and trained when the Emperor died. For one of the audience to leave his place while the Emperor was singing was so great a crime, that, in order to do so secretly, the most absurd precautions were taken. In competitions he vilified his rivals and sought to put them out of countenance—with such success that the poor wretches sang out of tune to escape the danger of being compared to him. The judges encouraged him, and praised his shy modesty. If the grotesque spectacle caused anyone to blush or show displeasure, he said that they were persons whose impartiality he suspected. However, he obeyed the prize regulations like a schoolboy, trembled before the *agonothetes* and the

*mastigophores*, and paid not to be beaten when he made a mistake. If he made a blunder which might have disqualified him, he turned pale; it was necessary to assure him, in a low voice, that it had not been noticed amid the enthusiasm and applause of the populace. The statues of former laureates were overthrown that they might not excite him to fits of frenzied jealousy. At races he was carefully permitted to arrive first at the winning-post, even when falling from his chariot; but sometimes he arranged to be defeated, in order to make it believe that he was playing fairly. In Italy, as we have already said, he felt humiliated from only owing his success to a band of paid applauders skilfully organised and highly paid, which followed him everywhere. The Romans became insupportable to him; he treated them as rustics, saying that a self-respecting artist could only have the Greeks in view.

The departure, so long desired, took place in November, 66. Nero had been some days in Achaia when news reached him of the defeat of Cestius. He understood that this war demanded a captain of experience and valour; but, above all things, he wished to send someone whom he did not fear. These conditions seemed united in Titus Flavius Vespasianus, a serious soldier, sixty years of age, who had always been favoured by fortune, and whom his obscure birth could not inspire with ambitious designs. Vespasian was, at the moment, out of favour with Nero, because he did not manifest sufficient admiration of the latter's singing; when messengers arrived to inform him that he was to have command of the Palestine expedition, it flashed across his mind that they had come with his death warrant. His son Titus soon joined him. About the same time Mucianus succeeded Cestius in the office of imperial legate in Syria. The three men who, in two years, were to be masters of the Empire's fate, thus found themselves brought in each other's company to the East.

The complete victory won by the insurgents over a Roman army, commanded by an imperial legate, raised their audacity to a very high pitch. The most intelligent and



best informed people in Jerusalem were gloomy; everything led them to see that the final advantage could only remain with the Romans. The ruin of the Temple and of the nation seemed to them inevitable, and emigration commenced. All the Herodians and people attached to Agrippa's service withdrew to the Romans. A large number of Pharisees, on the other hand, exclusively preoccupied with observance of the Law and the peaceful future for Israel of which they dreamed, were of opinion that submission should be made to the Romans, as submission had been made to the kings of Persia and to the Ptolemies. They thought little of national independence; Rabbi Johanan ben Zaka, the most celebrated Pharisee of the time, lived apart from politics. It was probably from this time that many doctors retired to Jamnia, where they founded the Talmudical schools which soon acquired great fame.

The massacres, however, began again and extended over parts of Syria, which, up till then, had been exempt from the epidemic of blood. At Damascus all the Jews were slaughtered. The majority of the women at Damascus professed the Jewish religion, and certainly there were Christians among their number; precautions were observed that they should be ignorant of the impending massacre in order that they might be taken by surprise.

The no-surrender party developed extraordinary activity. Even the more lukewarm were carried away by enthusiasm. A council was held in the Temple to form a national government composed of the elect of the nation. The moderate group was at this epoch far from having abdicated. Whether it trusted it might again direct the movement, whether it had one of those secret hopes contrary to all the suggestions of reason with which people are so ready to lull themselves in hours of crisis, it almost everywhere allowed itself to be drawn into the affairs in progress. Men of high importance, several members of the Sadducean or sacerdotal families, the leaders of the Pharisees, that is to say, the upper middle-class, having at its head the wise and upright Simeon

ben Gamaliel (son of the Gamaliel of the Acts and great-grandson of Hillel) adhered to the revolution. Constitutional action was taken; the sovereignty of the Sanhedrim was recognized. The city and the Temple remained in the hands of the established authorities, Hanan (son of the Hanan who condemned Jesus), the oldest of the High Priests, Joshua ben Gamala, Simeon ben Gamaliel, and Joseph ben Gorion. Joseph ben Gorion and Hanan were appointed rulers at Jerusalem. Eleazar, son of Simon, an insincere demagogue, whose personal ambition had been rendered dangerous by the treasures which he had amassed, was designedly passed over. Commissioners for the provinces were selected at the same time, all of whom were moderates with a single exception, Eleazar, son of Ananus, who was sent to Idumæa. Josephus, who afterwards won such brilliant renown as a historian, was prefect of Galilee. Among those selected there were many serious men who accepted office, in great measure, with the idea of attempting to maintain order, and with the hope of over-ruling the anarchical elements which threatened to destroy everything.

The enthusiasm at Jerusalem was extreme. The city resembled a camp, or an arsenal; on every side resounded the cries of young men at exercise. Jews from distant parts of the East, above all from the kingdom of the Parthians, flocked thither, convinced that the Roman Empire had had its day. It was felt that Nero was approaching his end, and that the Empire would disappear with him. This last representative of the title of Cæsar plunging into the depths of shame and contempt, seemed an unmistakable sign. By taking this point of view one cannot but recognise that the insurrection was much less insane than it now appears to us, to us who know that the Empire had still within it the necessary vitality for several future renewals of life. It might very well have been believed that the work of Augustus was breaking up; an incursion by the Parthians into Roman territories was constantly expected, and indeed it might have really taken place, if, owing to diverse causes, Arsacidæan policy had not at the time been

greatly enfeebled. One of the finest images in the Book of Enoch is that in which the prophet beholds the sword given to the sheep, and the sheep thus armed pursue, in their turn, the wild beasts and put them to flight. Such, indeed, was the feeling of the Jews. Their lack of military training prevented them from understanding how misleading were the successes they had won over Florus and Cestius. They struck coins imitated from the Maccabean pattern, bearing the effigy of the Temple or some Jewish emblem with inscriptions in archaic Hebrew characters. Dated by years 'from the Deliverance,' or 'from the freedom of Zion,' these coins were at first anonymous, or put into circulation in the name of Jerusalem; but later they bore the names of party chiefs who, at the will of some faction, exercised supreme authority. It may even be that, from the earliest months of the revolt, Eleazar, son of Simon, who possessed enormous wealth, dared to stamp money, giving himself the title of 'High Priest.' These monetary issues must have been, in any case, considerable; they formed what was afterwards called 'Jerusalem money' or 'danger money.'

Hanan grew more and more to be the leader of the moderate party. He still hoped to incline the mass of the people towards peace; he secretly sought to delay the manufacture of arms, and to paralyse resistance whilst to all appearance organising it. Hanan, in thus playing the game that is most formidable in times of revolution, was in truth what revolutionaries call a traitor. In the eyes of the enthusiasts he was guilty of the crime of clear foresight; in the eyes of history, he cannot be absolved from the charge of having accepted the falsest of positions, that which consists in making war without believing in it, simply because one is impelled by ignorant fanatics. The disorder in the provinces was frightful. The purely Arab regions to the east and the south of the Dead Sea flung into Judæa masses of bandits, who subsisted on pillage and massacre. Order under such circumstances was impossible; for to establish order it would have been necessary to expel the two elements which went to form the strength of the

revolution, fanaticism and brigandage. It is a terrible position of affairs when there is no choice except between an appeal to a foreign power and anarchy! In Acrabetene a young and valiant partisan, Simon, son of Gioras, plundered and tortured the rich. In Galilee, Josephus vainly endeavoured to make reason prevail; a certain John of Gischala, a knavish and audacious agitator in whom were united an implacable personality and an ardent enthusiasm, succeeded in thwarting him in every direction. Josephus was reduced, in accordance with the eternal usage in the East, to enrolling the brigands and paying them a regular salary as a ransom for the country.

Vespasian was meanwhile preparing for the difficult campaign with which he had been entrusted. His plan was to attack the insurrection from the north, to crush it first of all in Galilee, then in Judæa, to force it back in some way on Jerusalem; and, when he had driven it in entirety towards the central point where, crowding together, famine and internal squabbles could not fail to bring about frightful scenes, to await the end, or, if that did not suffice, to strike a great blow. He first betook himself to Antioch, where Agrippa II. came and joined him with all his forces. Up to the present, Antioch had not had its Jewish massacre, no doubt because it had within it a large number of Greeks who had embraced the Jewish religion (most frequently under a Christian form), which had the effect of deadening hatred. Now, however, the storm burst forth; the foolish accusation of having desired to burn the town, led to massacres, followed by somewhat rigorous persecution, in which many disciples of Jesus doubtless suffered, confounded as they were with the followers of another faith which was no longer more than half their own.

The expedition started in March 67, followed the usual route along the sea coast, and established its headquarters at Ptolemais (Acre). The first blow fell on Galilee. The population was heroic. The little town of Joudifat or Jotapata, which had recently been fortified, made an extraordinary resistance. Not one of its survivors wished

to survive; caged in a position from which there was no means of escape, they slew each other. From that time forth 'Galilean' became the synonym for a fanatical sectary, seeking certain death with a kind of obstinacy. Tiberias, Tarichæa and Gamala were only captured after veritable butcheries. There are in history few examples of an entire race being thus crushed out of existence. The waves of the peaceful lake by which Jesus had dreamed of the kingdom of God were stained with blood. The shore was covered with putrefying corpses, the air was tainted. Crowds of Jews had taken refuge on boats; Vespasian had them all slain or drowned. The healthy survivors of the population were sold into slavery; six thousand captives were sent to Nero in Achaia to carry out the most difficult part of the work of piercing the isthmus of Corinth, the old men were slaughtered. There was hardly more than one deserter: Josephus, who had little depth of character, and, moreover, had always had his doubts as to the issue of the war, gave himself up to the Romans, and was soon in the good graces of Vespasian and Titus. All his skill as a writer has not sufficed to clear this action of his from a certain stain of cowardice.

The middle of the year 67 was spent in this war of extermination. Galilee never recovered from it; the Christian part of the population no doubt took refuge beyond the lake; henceforth the native land of Jesus was to be of no account in the history of Christianity. Gischala, which held out the longest, fell in November or December. John of Gischala, who had furiously defended it, escaped and was able to reach Judæa. Vespasian and Titus took up their winter quarters at Cæsarea, and prepared to lay siege to Jerusalem in the following year.

The great weakness of provisional governments organised for national defence is their inability to stand defeat. Incessantly undermined as they are by advanced factions, they fall on the day on which they fail to give the fickle mob that to achieve which they have been entrusted with power — victory. John of Gischala and the Galilean



fugitives arriving every day at Jerusalem with rage in their hearts, raised to a still higher pitch the state of fury in which the revolutionary party lived and acted. They panted rather than breathed. 'We are not vanquished,' they cried, 'but we seek worthier posts; why should we wear ourselves out in Gischala and other paltry little towns, when we have the mother city to defend?' 'I have seen,' said John of Gischala, 'the battering-rams of the Romans fly to pieces against the walls of Galilean villages; unless they have wings they will not clear the ramparts of Jerusalem.' All the younger men were for war to the death. Troops of volunteers turn easily to pillage; bands of fanatics, whether of a religious or political order, always resemble brigands. One must live, and voluntary bodies can scarcely find a living, without harassing the population. This is why brigand and hero, at an epoch of national crisis, are almost convertible terms. A war party is always tyrannical; moderation has never saved a country, for the first principle of moderation is to bow to circumstances, and heroism, as a rule, consists in not listening to reason. Josephus, essentially a man of law and order, is probably right in representing the no-surrender resolution as having been made by a small number of demoniacs, forcibly dragging after them peaceful citizens who would have been perfectly well pleased to submit. Most often it is thus; great sacrifices are only to be obtained from a nation that has no dynasty by terrorising it. The mass is essentially timid, but timidity counts for nothing in revolutionary times. The enthusiasts are always few in numbers, but they impose their will by barring the paths to conciliation. The law of such situations is that power necessarily falls into the hands of the most ardent, and that statesmen are fatally impotent.

Before this intense fever, increasing with each day, the moderate party's position was no longer tenable. The bands of pillagers, after having ravaged the country districts, fell back on Jerusalem; those who were flying before the Roman arms came in their turn to huddle together in the city, and brought it to starvation point.



No effective authority was enforced; the Zelotes reigned supreme, and all those to whom the suspicion of 'moderation' attached, suffered pitiless massacre. Up till the present, war and excesses had stopped at the Temple barriers. Now, however, Zelotes and brigands dwelt pell-mell within the sacred building, all the rules of legal purity seemed forgotten, the courts were stained with blood that defiled the feet of those who walked therein. In the eyes of the priests there was no crime more horrible. To many devotees this was the 'abomination' predicted by Daniel as destined to take place on the eve of the supreme days. The Zelotes, like all militant fanatics, had little regard for rites, and subordinated them to the holy work *par excellence*, warfare. In changing the succession to the High Priesthood, they committed an outrage not less grave. Without paying any attention to the privileges of the families from which it had been customary to select the High Priests, they chose an unimportant branch of the priestly race, and had recourse to the entirely democratic procedure of drawing lots. Drawing lots naturally brought about absurd results; the office fell to a rustic who had to be dragged to Jerusalem and invested, in spite of himself, with the sacred robes. The High Priesthood was profaned with carnival scenes. All seriously-minded people, Pharisees, Sadducees, and men like Simeon ben Gamaliel and Joseph ben Gorion, were wounded in what they held most dear.

So many excesses at length decided the aristocratic Sadducean party on attempting to bring about a reaction. With much skill and courage, Hanan endeavoured to unite the honest citizens and all in whom good sense still remained to cause the downfall of the monstrous alliance of fanaticism and impiety. The Zelotes were closely hemmed in and compelled to take refuge in the Temple, which had now become a hospital full of wounded men. To save the revolution, they had recourse to the desperate expedient of summoning into the city the Idumæans, that is to say, those troops of bandits accustomed to every

kind of violence, which prowled about the country round Jerusalem. The entry of the Idumæans was signalized by a massacre. All the members of the priestly caste who could be found were slain. Hanan and Jesus, son of Gamala, suffered frightful insults; their dead bodies were denied sepulchre, an unheard-of outrage among the Jews.

Thus perished the son of the chief agent in the death of Jesus. The Beni-Hanan remained faithful till the end to the position they had taken up, and, if I may dare to say so to their duty. Like the majority of those who seek to make a stand against the extravagances of sects and fanaticism, they were swept away; but they perished nobly. The last of the Hanans appears to have been a man of great capacity; for nearly two years he fought against anarchy. He was a true aristocrat, harsh at times, but a serious man, filled with genuine feeling for the public good, highly respected, liberal in the sense that he desired his nation to be governed by its nobility and not by violent factions. Josephus does not doubt that, had he lived, he would have succeeded in bringing about an honourable peace between the Romans and the Jews, and he regards the day of his death as that on which the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish commonwealth were finally doomed. It was, at least, the last day for the Sadducean party, a party often haughty, egoistical, and cruel, but a party which, after all, represented the only body of opinion that was reasonable and capable of saving the country. One might be tempted to use the vulgar expression and say that, by the death of Hanan, Jesus was avenged. It was the Beni-Hanan who, in the presence of Jesus, had murmured: 'If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation,'<sup>1</sup> and added, 'that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.'<sup>2</sup> Let us abstain, however, from so naïvely impious an expression of opinion. There is no more vengeance in history than in nature; revolutions have no more justice than the volcano which bursts forth, or the

<sup>1</sup> John xi. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xviii. 14.

avalanche rushing on its way. The year 1793 did not punish Richelieu, Louis XIV., or the founders of French unity; but it proved that they were men of limited views, if they did not feel the vanity of what they did, the frivolity of their Machiavellism, the uselessness of their profound policy, the stupid cruelty of their statecraft. Ecclesiastes was alone the sage when, disabused, he cried aloud: 'All is vanity under the sun.'

With Hanan perished, in the early days of 68, the old Jewish priesthood in the fief of the great Sadducean families, which had given such strong opposition to infant Christianity. A great impression was made by the sight of these highly respected aristocrats, who, but a little while before, had been seen clad in their superb pontifical vestments, presiding over pompous ceremonies, surrounded by the veneration of the many pilgrims who from all parts of the earth came to Jerusalem, thus flung naked out of the city to be devoured by dogs and jackals. It was a whole world that was disappearing. The democratic High Priesthood, inaugurated by the rebels, was of short duration. The Christians at first believed that they could exalt two or three persons by adorning their foreheads with the priestly *petalon*. But all this was of no importance. Neither the priesthood, nor the Temple on which it was dependent, was destined to be the essential element in Judaism. The essential element was the enthusiast, the prophet, the Zelotes, the messenger of God. The prophet had slain kingship; the enthusiast, the fierce sectary, slew priesthood. Priesthood and kingship once slain, there survived the fanatic who, for two and a half years longer, was to persevere in his struggle against fate. When the fanatic had been crushed in his turn, there was to remain the doctor, the Rabbi, the interpreter of the *Thora*. Priest and king were destined never to rise again.

Nor was the Temple. These Zelotes who, to the great scandal of the priests favourably inclined towards the Romans, turned the holy place into a fortress and a hospital, were not so far as might appear at first sight

from the feeling of Jesus. What mattered these stones? The spirit is the one thing that counts, and he who defends the spirit of Israel, revolution, has a right to defile the stones. From the day on which Isaiah had said: 'What value have your sacrifices for me? They disgust me. It is righteousness of the heart that I desire,' materialistic worship was an antiquated routine which had sooner or later to disappear.

The opposition between the priesthood and that part of the nation, at bottom entirely democratic, which admitted no other claims to nobility than those of piety and observance of the Law, can be felt from the times of Nehemiah, in whom the Pharisee is already apparent. To the minds of the sages the true Aaron is the man of righteousness. The Asmonæans, who were at once priests and kings, inspired nothing but aversion in pious men. Sadduceeism, growing day by day more unpopular and more rancorous, was saved only by the distinction made by the people between religion and its ministers. No kings, no priests: such was essentially the ideal of the Pharisee. Incapable of forming a self-contained state, Judaism necessarily had to reach the position which we have seen it occupying for the last eighteen centuries, that namely of a parasite in the commonwealth of others. It was destined to a like extent to become a religion lacking both Temple and priest. The Temple made the priest necessary; its destruction was to be a kind of deliverance. Thus the Zelotes, who, in the year 68, slew the priests and defiled the Temple in defence of God's cause, did not overstep the true tradition of Israel.

But it was clear that, deprived of all the ballast of conservatism, manned by a frenzied crew, the vessel would sail straight to destruction. After the massacre of the Sadducees, unbridled violence reigned supreme in Jerusalem. Oppression was so stringent that no one dared either weep or bury the dead openly. Compassion became a crime. The number of suspected persons of distinguished rank who perished by the cruelty of infuriated madmen is put at twelve thousand. In this matter it is no doubt necessary

to mistrust the estimates of Josephus. That historian's narrative of the domination of the Zelotes is, to a certain extent, absurd; reprobates and miscreants would not have gone to their death as did these. One might as well seek to explain the French Revolution by the gaol-delivery of some thousands of galley slaves. Wickedness, pure and simple, has never done anything in the world. The truth is, that popular risings, being the work of an obscure consciousness and not of reason, are compromised by their own victory. Following the rule of all movements of the same nature, the revolution at Jerusalem did nothing save destroy itself. The best patriots, those who had contributed most to the successes of the year 66, Gorion and Niger the Peraïte were put to death. All the moneyed class perished. The death of a certain Zacharias, son of Baruch, the most upright man in Jerusalem and one greatly loved by all honest folk, made an especially deep impression. He was arraigned before a revolutionary jury which unanimously acquitted him; but the Zelotes slew him in the Temple. This Zacharias, son of Baruch, may have been a friend of the Christians; for it is believed that an allusion to him is to be found in the prophetic words on the terrors of the last days which the evangelists attribute to Jesus.

The extraordinary events of which Jerusalem was the scene, impressed the Christians indeed in the highest degree. The peaceful disciples of Jesus, deprived of their leader, James, brother of the Lord, at first continued to lead their ascetic life in the Holy City, and, huddled around the Temple, to await the great coming. They had with them the remaining survivors of the family of Jesus, the sons of Cleopas, who were regarded, even by the Jews, with the highest veneration. All that was going on must have seemed to them an evident confirmation of the words of Jesus. What could these convulsions be if not the beginning of what was called 'the travail of the Messiah,' prelude to the Messianic birth? It was held as certain that the triumphant coming of Christ would be preceded by the appearance of a great number of false prophets. In the



eyes of the Christian community's chiefs, these false prophets were the leaders of the Zelotes. The terrible phrases that Jesus frequently had in his mouth to express the scourges which were to announce the day of judgment, were applied to current events. It may be that some inspired men arose in the midst of the Church, claiming to speak in the name of Jesus, but they were strongly opposed by the elders, who assured their followers that Jesus had prophesied the coming of such seducers and given warning that they were to be shunned. This caution sufficed; the hierarchy, already strong in the Church, and the spirit of meekness inherited from Jesus arrested all these impostures; Christianity benefited from the high ability with which it had been capable of creating an authoritative power in the very heart of a popular movement. The growing episcopate, or rather presbytery, put a check on the great aberrations from which the popular mind, when undirected, never escapes. One feels that thenceforth the spirit of the Church, in human affairs, was to be a kind of moderate good sense, a conservative and practical instinct, showing distrust of democratic chimeras, in strange contrast with the exaltation of its supernatural principles.

This political wisdom of the representatives of the Church of Jerusalem was not without merit. The Zelotes and the Christians had common foes—that is to say, the Sadducees, the Beni-Hanan. The ardent faith of the Zelotes could not fail to have great seductions for the not less exalted souls of the Judeo-Christians. These enthusiasts, who led forth the multitudes into the wilderness to reveal the kingdom of God to them, greatly resembled John the Baptist, and, to a slight extent, Jesus. Apparently some of the faithful affiliated themselves to the party, and allowed themselves to be carried away by the current; yet, nevertheless, the peaceful spirit inherent in Christianity carried the day. The heads of the Church combated these dangerous tendencies with discourses which they alleged had been uttered by Jesus:—

Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray. . . .



Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Here ; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders ; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness ; go not forth : Behold, he is in the inner chambers ; believe it not. <sup>1</sup>

There were, no doubt, some apostasies and even instances of brethren betraying one another ; political divisions caused charity to turn colder. But the majority, while deeply feeling Israel's crisis, gave no support to anarchy, even though it were coloured with a patriotic pretext. The Christian manifesto of this solemn hour was a discourse attributed to Jesus, a kind of apocalypse, based perhaps on some words actually spoken by the master, which explained the connection of the final catastrophe, thenceforth held to be close at hand, with the existent political situation. It was only later, after the siege, that the entire piece was written ; but certain phrases in it, attributed to Jesus, relate to the period with which we are now dealing.

When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains : let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house : and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days ! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath : for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>2</sup>

Other apocalypses of the same nature, bearing the name of Enoch and offering singular resemblances to the discourse attributed to Jesus, were, it appears, in circulation. In one of them the divine Wisdom, personified as a prophetic being, reproaches the people with its crimes, its murders of the prophets, the hardness of its heart. Fragments which have survived, and may be supposed to have formed part of it, apparently allude to the murder of Zacharias, son of Baruch. A 'zenith of scandal,' reaching the highest pitch of

<sup>1</sup> Matthew xxiv. 4, 5, 23-26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xxiv. 15-21.

horror possible to human wickedness, is also mentioned, and may well be taken to refer to the profanation of the Temple by the Zelotes. So many monstrous deeds proved that the coming of the Well-Beloved was at hand, and that the just would not have to wait long for vengeance. The Judeo-Christians especially were too greatly attached to the Temple for such a sacrilege not to fill them with horror. The like had not been seen since the days of Nebuchadnezzar.

The whole family of Jesus thought the time had come to fly. The murder of James had already much weakened the ties of the Hierosolymite Christians with Jewish orthodoxy; the separation between Church and Synagogue grew wider day by day. The Jews' hatred of the pious sectaries, being no longer held in check by Roman law, doubtless caused more than one act of violence. The life of the holy men, whose habit it was to remain in the outer courts and make their devotions there, had moreover been one of trouble, since the Zelotes had turned the Temple into a fortress and defiled it with assassinations. Some went so far as to say that the name which could fitly be applied to a city thus profaned was no longer Zion but Sodom, and that the position of true Israelites resembled that of their ancestors when captives in Egypt.

The departure seems to have been decided on in the early part of 68. To give more authority to this resolution the rumour was spread that the heads of the community had received a revelation in the matter; according to some, this revelation had been granted through the ministry of an angel. It is probable that all responded to the chiefs' appeal, and that none of the brethren remained in the city which, a very just instinct told them, was doomed to extermination.

There are indications inclining one to believe that the flight of the peaceful band was not performed without risk. Apparently the Jews pursued it; as a matter of fact the terrorists exercised a vigilant watch over the roads, and slew as traitors all those who sought to escape, unless they

could pay a high ransom. A circumstance, to which we only have a veiled allusion, saved the fugitives :

And the serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman [the Church of Jerusalem] water as a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon waxed wroth with the woman.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the Zelotes tried to drive the holy band into the Jordan, and the latter succeeded in crossing the river at a place where the water was shallow ; it may be that the troop sent in pursuit went astray, and thus lost the traces of those whom it was chasing.

The place selected by the heads of the community to serve as the principal asylum for the fugitive Church was Pella, one of the towns of Decapolis, situated near the left bank of the Jordan in an admirable position, overlooking on one side the whole plain of Ghor, and having on the other precipitous cliffs, at the foot of which runs a torrent. No wiser choice could have been made. Judæa, Idumæa, Peræa, and Galilee were in insurrection ; Samaria and the coast were in a very unsettled state owing to the war. Thus Scythopolis and Pella were the nearest neutral cities to Jerusalem. Pella, by its position beyond the Jordan, must have offered much more tranquillity than Scythopolis, which had become one of the Roman strongholds. Pella was a free city like the other towns of Decapolis, but apparently it had given allegiance to Agrippa II. To take refuge there was openly to avow horror of the revolt. The importance of the town dated from the Macedonian conquest. A colony of Alexander's veterans had taken up their quarters there, and changed the Semitic name of the place into another, which recalled their native land to the old soldiers. Pella was captured by Alexander Jannæus, and the Greek inhabitants, who refused to be circumcised, suffered much from Jewish fanaticism. The pagan population doubtless took new root, for, in the massacres of 66, Pella was considered a Syrian town, and was once more sacked by the

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xii. 15-17.

Jews. It was in this anti-Jewish town that the Church of Jerusalem found refuge during the horrors of the siege. Here it was at ease, and looked on its tranquil abode as a sure place, a desert prepared by God, where, far from men's tumultuous strife, the hour of the coming of Jesus might be awaited in peace. The community lived on their savings; it was believed that God himself took it upon him to feed them, and many saw in such a lot, so different from that of the Jews, a miracle predicted by the prophets. No doubt the Galilean Christians had for their part betaken themselves to the east of the Jordan and the lake into Batanæa and Gaulonitis. The territories of Agrippa II. thus formed an adoptive country for the Judeo-Christians of Palestine. What gave high importance to this band of Christian refugees was that it took with it the surviving members of the family of Jesus, who were treated with the most profound respect, and designated in Greek as *desposyni*, 'the kinsmen of the Master.' We are soon to see, in fact, how the Christian community on the other side of the Jordan was to keep alive Ebionism, that is to say, the very tradition of the words of Jesus. It was from it that the Synoptic Gospels were to arise.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DEATH OF NERO

AT the first appearance of spring in the year 68, Vespasian took the field once more. His plan of campaign, as we have already said, was to crush Judaism step by step, proceeding from the north and west towards the south and east, to force the fugitives back on Jerusalem, and then to massacre the mob of rebels without mercy. In pursuance of this scheme he advanced to Emmaus, situated twenty-one miles from Jerusalem, at the foot of the great slope which ascends from the plain of Lydda to the holy city. He did not consider that the time had yet come for an attack on the latter; he ravaged Idumæa, then Samaria, and, on June 3rd, established his headquarters at Jericho, whence he despatched troops to massacre the Jews of Peræa. Jerusalem was hemmed in and surrounded on all sides by a circle of extermination. Vespasian returned to Cæsarea to concentrate all his forces. There he learnt news which brought him to an abrupt stand, and had the effect of prolonging resistance and revolution at Jerusalem for two years longer.

Nero had died on June 9th. During the great struggles in Judæa, which we have just described, he had been continuing his life as an artist in Greece, whence he only returned to Rome towards the close of 67. He had never enjoyed himself so much before; to suit his convenience, all the games were arranged to take place in a single year; all the towns awarded him the prizes in their competitions; deputations were constantly arriving to beseech him to come

and sing in their district. The childish creature, a booby (or perhaps a jester) such as had never lived before, was enchanted with delight. 'The Greeks alone know how to listen,' he said; 'the Greeks alone are worthy of me and of my efforts.' He heaped privileges upon them, proclaimed the freedom of Greece at the Isthmian Games, paid highly the oracles who prophesied to his advantage, suppressed those who did not please him, and had, it is said, a singer, who did now lower his voice sufficiently to show off his own, put to death by strangling. Helius, one of the miscreants to whom, at the time of his departure, he had granted plenary powers over Rome and the Senate, pressed him to return; for the gravest political symptoms were beginning to show themselves. Nero replied that his duty was, before all else, to his reputation, since he was under the necessity of husbanding his resources with a view to the time when he might have no Empire. His constant thought was, in fact, that if fortune ever reduced him to the rank of a private individual, he might very well support himself by his art, and, when told that he was exerting himself too much, he used to say that the exercise which for him was now but a prince's relaxation, might one day be his means of subsistence. One of the things that most flatter persons of fashion who dabble a little in art or literature, is to imagine that, were they poor, they could live by their talents. All this notwithstanding, his voice was weak and inexpressive, although to keep it in condition he followed out the absurd prescriptions of the medicine of those days. His singing-master never quitted him, and was constantly enjoining on him the most puerile precautions. One blushes at the thought of Greece being defiled by this ignoble masquerade. Some towns, however, observed a proper attitude; the scoundrel dared not set foot in Athens, and he was not invited.

News of the most alarming sort, however, reached him, and, nearly a year after his departure from Rome, he gave orders to return. This return was in keeping with the rest of the journey. In every town he received triumphal



honours ; the walls were thrown down to allow him to enter. At Rome an unprecedented carnival took place. He mounted the chariot on which Augustus had ridden in triumph ; beside him sat Diodorus the musician ; on his head was the Olympic crown, and in his right hand the Pythian crown. Before him were borne the other crowns and, on placards, lists of his victories, the names of those he had defeated, and the titles of the pieces in which he had played. The hired applauders, trained in the three kinds of applause which he had invented, and the Knights of Augustus followed ; the arch of the Great Amphitheatre was demolished for his entrance. Nothing was to be heard but shouts of 'Long live the Olympic victor, the Pythian victor ! Augustus ! Augustus ! Nero Hercules ! Nero Apollo ! One and only *periodonice* whose like has never been ! Augustus ! Augustus ! O sacred voice, happy he that may hear it !' The eighteen hundred and eight crowns which he had brought back were displayed in the Great Amphitheatre and attached to the Egyptian obelisk, which Augustus had placed there to serve as a *meta*.

At last the hearts of the nobler portions of the human race were moved to deep indignation. The East, Judæa excepted, suffered the shameful tyranny without a blush, and even liked it fairly well ; but honourable feeling still survived in the West. It is one of the glories of Gaul that the downfall of such a tyrant should have been her work. While the Teutonic soldiers, filled with hatred of the republicans and slaves to their principles of fidelity, acted towards Nero, as towards all the Emperors, the part of faithful bodyguards, the cry of revolt was uttered by an Aquitanian, a descendant of the ancient kings of the country. The movement was thoroughly Gaulish ; and, without thinking of the consequences, the Gaulish legions threw themselves enthusiastically into the movement. The signal was given by Vindex about March 15th, 68. The news speedily reached Rome, and the walls soon bore insulting inscriptions ; 'By his singing,' said sorry jesters, 'he has awakened the cocks (*gallos*).' At the outset Nero

treated the matter as a joke ; he even expressed his pleasure at having an occasion furnished him of enriching himself by plundering the Gauls. He continued to sing and enjoy himself until Vindex had proclamations put up, in which he was described as a pitiable artist. Then the mountebank wrote from Naples, where he was staying at the time, to the Senate, asking for justice, and set out for Rome. He affected, however, to be only interested in certain newly-invented musical instruments, more especially in a kind of hydraulic organ, concerning which he consulted, in all seriousness, the knights and the Senate.

The news of Galba's defection (April 3rd) and of the alliance of Spain with Gaul, which he received while at dinner, came on him like a thunderclap. He threw over the table at which he was sitting, tore the letter to shreds, and in his anger broke two embossed vases of great price from which he was accustomed to drink. In the absurd preparations which he began to make, his chief solicitude was for his musical instruments, his theatrical properties, and his women whom he had dressed as Amazons with bucklers, axes, and close-cropped hair. He had strange alternations of dejection and lugubrious buffoonery, which one knows not whether to take seriously or consider as mere mania, since all Nero's actions float between the black wickedness of a cruel dunce and the irony of a cynic. He did not possess an idea that was not puerile. The sham world of art in which he dwelt had made the veriest fool of him. At times he thought less of fighting than of going, unarmed, to weep before his foes in the hope of rousing their pity—in fact, he had already begun to compose the *epinicion* which he was to sing with them on the morrow of the reconciliation. At other times he wished to have the whole of the Senate massacred, to burn Rome a second time, and, during the conflagration, to let the wild beasts from the amphitheatre loose on the city. The Gauls, above all, were the object of his rage ; he spoke of having those who were at Rome slaughtered as allies of their compatriots and as being suspected of wishing to join

them. At intervals, he had the idea of changing the seat of government and retiring to Alexandria, for he remembered that prophets had promised him the empire of the East, and, in particular, the kingdom of Jerusalem. He dreamed that his musical talent might give him a livelihood, and this possibility, which would be the best proof of his merit, caused him to cherish a secret joy. Then he consoled himself with literature, pointing out how unique was his position, how unprecedented all that was happening to him,—never had a prince lost in his lifetime so mighty an empire. Even on days of the keenest anguish, he made no change in his habits; he spoke more of literature than of the Gaulish affair, sang, cracked jests, went to the theatre incognito, and wrote in a personal letter to an actor who pleased him: ‘It is very wrong of you to hold the attention of a man so much occupied!’

The lack of unity among the Gaulish armies, the death of Vindex, the weakness of Galba, might perhaps have postponed the world’s deliverance had the Roman army in its turn not asserted itself. The Prætorians revolted and proclaimed Galba on the evening of June 8th. Nero saw that all was lost, his deranged imagination only suggested grotesque ideas to him: to array himself in mourning garments, to go and harangue the people in this garb, to use all his histrionic power to excite compassion and thus to obtain forgiveness for the past, or, in default of anything better, the governorship of Egypt. He wrote out his speech, but was told by some one that, before reaching the Forum, he would be torn in pieces. He retired to rest: awaking in the middle of the night, he found that he was without guards, and that his chamber was already given over to pillage. He went out, knocked at various doors, but without being answered. He returned, said he wished to die, and asked for the gladiator Spiculus, a brilliant slayer, one of the celebrities of the amphitheatre. Every one turned away. He went out anew, wandered about the streets alone, turned his steps towards the Tiber, with the idea of drowning himself, and then returned the way he came.

People seemed to make a void round him. Then Phaon, his freedman, offered him as a refuge his villa, situated between the Via Salaria and the Via Nomentana, near the fourth milestone. The miserable man, half-clad, covered with a wretched cloak, mounted on a broken-down horse, his face muffled up to escape recognition, set out accompanied by three or four of his freedmen, among whom were Phaon, Sporus, and Epaphroditus, his secretary. It was not yet dawn; as he went out by the Porta Collina, he heard from the Prætorian camp, by which he passed, the cries of the soldiers cursing him and proclaiming Galba. A swerve made by his horse, owing to the stench of a corpse thrown on the road, caused him to be recognised. He was, however, able to reach Phaon's villa, by crawling on his stomach under bushes and hiding behind reeds.

His jocose manner, his street boy slang, did not desert him. It was thought desirable that he should creep into one of the pozzuolite pits which are common in those districts. This gave him an opportunity for a witticism. 'What a destiny is mine,' he said; 'to be buried alive!' His conversation was, so to speak, a rolling fire of classical quotations, intermingled with the heavy pleasantries of a sorry clown at the last gasp. He had a literary reminiscence, a dull antithesis ready for every occasion. 'He that once was proud of his numerous suite has now no more than three freedmen.' At moments the memory of his victims returned to him, but only resulted in rhetorical figures, never in a moral act of repentance. The comedian outlived everything. His position was for him only one drama more, a drama which he had rehearsed. Recalling the parts in which he had represented parricides, or princes reduced to beggary, he remarked that he was now playing on his own account, and hummed the verse that a tragic poet had put into the mouth of *Œdipus* :

My wife, my mother, and my sire  
Have all doomed me to death.

Incapable as he was of thinking seriously, he desired that

his grave should be dug to a depth equal to his height, and had water and pieces of marble and wood brought for his obsequies, weeping all the while, and exclaiming: 'What an artist is about to die!'

Phaon's courier, however, arrives bearing a despatch, and Nero tears it from him. He reads that the Senate has declared him a public enemy, and has condemned him to be punished 'after the ancient custom.' 'What is this custom?' he asks. He is told that the victim, stripped naked, has his head fixed in a fork, is then beaten with rods until death ensues, and finally has his corpse dragged by hooks and cast into the Tiber. He trembles, takes two daggers which he has with him, tries their points, and sheathes them, with the remark that 'the fatal hour has not yet come.' He invites Sporus to begin his funeral dirge, and attempts anew to slay himself—without success. His awkwardness, the talent he had for making all the fibres of his soul vibrate out of tune, his laughter at once silly and infernal, the pretentious stupidity which made his whole life resemble the caterwauling of some grotesque witches' Sabbath, reaches the extreme point of idiocy. He cannot succeed in killing himself. 'Is there no one here then,' he asks, 'to give me an example?' He pours forth quotations in still greater number, speaks in Greek, improvises scraps of verse. Of a sudden the noise of the cavalry troop coming to seize him alive is heard.

'I hear the thunderous hoofs of horses beat the ground,'<sup>1</sup> he cries. Then Epaphroditus leans upon the dagger and makes it enter his throat. Almost at the same moment the centurion arrives, tries to stop the flow of blood, and seeks to make Nero believe that he has come to save him. 'Too late!' gasps the dying man, whose eyes are starting out of his head and glazed with horror. 'And this is your fidelity!' are the last words he utters as he expires. It was his best stroke of humour. Nero letting fall a melancholy lament over the wickedness of his age and the disappearance of good faith and virtue! . . . Let us applaud. The drama

<sup>1</sup> *Iliad* x. 535.



is complete. For once, O thousand-faced Nature, hast thou found an actor worthy to play such a part!

He had strongly insisted that his head should not be delivered over to insults, and that his whole body should be burnt. His two nurses and Acte, who still loved him, buried him secretly in a rich, white shroud embroidered in gold, with the luxury which they knew he would have loved. His ashes were placed in the tomb of the Domitians, a great mausoleum which crowned the Garden Mount (the *Pincio*), and had a fine effect viewed from the *Campus Martius*. There his spectre haunted the Middle Ages like a vampire; and to dispel the apparitions which troubled the peace of the district, the church of *Santa Maria del Popolo* was built.

Thus perished at the age of thirty-one, after a reign of thirteen years and eight months, not the maddest or most wicked, but the vainest and most ridiculous sovereign whom ever the hazard of events has brought into the foreground of history. Nero, before all else, was a literary perversion. He was far from being void of all talent, all good qualities, this poor young man intoxicated with bad literature, drunken with stage rhetoric, who forgot his empire in the company of Terpnos; who, when he received news of the Gaulish revolt, did not take his attention from the spectacle at which he was present, showed favour to the athlete, and, for several days, thought of nothing save his lyre and his voice. In all this the populace was chiefly to blame, the pleasure-loving populace, which exacted before everything else that the sovereign should find it amusement; and also the bad taste of the age, which had perverted the orders of greatness and attached too great a value to literary and artistic renown. The danger of literary education is that it inspires men with an immoderate desire for fame, without always providing the moral seriousness which defines the meaning of true glory. It was assured beforehand that a nature which was vain, cunning, filled with desire for the immense, the infinite, but lacking all judgment, would meet with deplorable shipwreck. Even his good qualities, such as his aversion from



war, were fatal, since they deprived him of taste for everything save methods of acquiring fame which he should not have practised. Unless one is a Marcus Aurelius, it is not a good thing to be too far above the prejudices of one's caste and rank. A prince is a soldier; a great prince can and ought to protect letters, but he ought not to be a man of letters himself. Augustus or Louis XIV. reigning over a brilliant intellectual development, presents, after cities of genius like Athens and Florence, the finest spectacle in history; Nero, Chilperic, and King Louis of Bavaria, are caricatures. In Nero's case the vastness of the imperial power and the severity of Roman customs gave the caricature the appearance of being drawn in blood.

To demonstrate the irremediable immorality of the multitude, it is often repeated that Nero was, in some respects, popular. The fact is, that there were two opposing currents of opinion concerning him. All the serious and upright part of the nation detested him; the lower classes loved him, some naïvely, in conformity with the vague sentiment which makes the poor plebeian love his prince if the latter has showy externals, the others because he intoxicated them with festivities. During these festivities he was to be seen mingling with the crowd, dining and eating at the theatre in the midst of the rabble. And then, moreover, did he not hate the Senate and the Roman nobility who were so harsh and had so little popularity? The rakehells about him were at least amiable and polished. The soldiers of his bodyguard also kept him in constant affection. For a long time his tomb was to be found adorned with fresh flowers, and images of him were placed on the Rostra by unknown hands. Otho's fortunes originated in his having been Nero's confidant and in imitating his manners of living. Vitellius also, to make himself popular at Rome, openly affected to take Nero as his model and follow his maxims of government. Thirty or forty years later everyone wished that he were still alive and longed that he might return.

This popularity, which need not cause us surprise, had, in point of fact, a singular result. The rumour was noised

abroad that the object of so many regrets was not really dead. Even in Nero's lifetime, in the very household of the Emperor, the dawn of the idea that he would be dethroned at Rome, but that a new reign, an Oriental and almost Messianic reign, would then begin for him, had been noticed. It is always difficult for the people to believe that men who have long taken up the world's attention have finally disappeared from view. The death of Nero at Phaon's villa, in the presence of a small number of witnesses, had not been very public in character; everything connected with his burial had taken place among three women devoted to him; Icelus was almost the only man who had seen the dead body, and no part of his person remained recognisable. It was possible to believe that a substitution had taken place; some affirmed that his corpse had not been found; others said that the wound in his neck had been bandaged and healed. Nearly all maintained that, at the instigation of the Parthian ambassador at Rome, he had taken refuge among the Arsacides, his allies, the eternal foes of the Romans, or with Tiridates, King of Armenia, whose journey to Rome in 66 had been accompanied by magnificent entertainments which greatly impressed the people. There, it was said, he was preparing the ruin of the Empire, and thence would soon return at the head of the chivalry of the East, to put to the torture those who had betrayed him. His partisans lived in this hope; already they erected statues to him and even circulated edicts bearing his signature. The Christians, on the other hand, who regarded him as a monster, when they heard such reports, which they believed as implicitly as did the populace, were filled with fear. The ideas in question persisted for a very long time, and, as nearly always happens in such circumstances, there were several false Nero's. We shall soon see the reaction of this opinion in the Christian Church, and the place which it holds in the prophetic literature of the age.

The extraordinary nature of the spectacle in progress left few people in their sober senses. Human nature had been

forced to the limits of the possible; there remained the vacuity of mind that follows attacks of fever; everywhere were spectres and bloody apparitions. The story ran that at the moment when Nero went out by the Porta Collina to take refuge at Phaon's villa, a lightning flash fell upon his eyes, and that simultaneously the earth trembled, as if it were rent open, and the souls of all those whom he had slain came and hurled themselves upon him. There was, as it were, a thirst for vengeance in the air. We are soon to witness one of the interludes of the great heavenly drama in which the souls of the slaughtered, huddled under God's altar, cry in a loud voice, 'How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'<sup>1</sup> And there shall be given them a white robe that they may wait yet a little longer.

<sup>1</sup> Revelation vi. 10.

## CHAPTER XIV

### PLAGUES AND PROGNOSTICS

THE first feeling of the Jews and Christians, on learning the news of the revolt of Vindex, had been one of extreme joy. They believed that the Empire was to end with the house of Cæsar, and that the rebellious generals, full of hatred against Rome, dreamed of nothing save making themselves independent in their respective provinces. The Gaulish movement was hailed in Judæa as having a significance analogous to that of the Jews themselves. In this there was a great error. No part of the Empire, Judæa excepted, desired the dissolution of the great association which gave the world peace and material prosperity. All these countries on the shores of the Mediterranean, once at strife with one another, were enchanted to live together in peace. Gaul herself, although less completely pacified than the rest, limited her revolutionary desires to overthrowing the bad Emperors, demanding reform, and longing for a liberal Empire. But one can understand how people accustomed to the short-lived dynasties of the East, may have regarded as ended an Empire whose dynasty had just been extinguished, and may have believed that the different nations under its yoke for one or two centuries were destined to form separate states under the generals who governed them. For eighteen months, as a matter of fact, none of the chiefs of the revolted legions succeeded in getting the better of his rivals for any length of time. Never had the world been seized with such tremors. At Rome the scarce dispelled nightmare of Nero; at Jerusalem an entire nation in a state of delirium; the

Christians still under the effects of the frightful massacre of the year 64; the earth itself a prey to the most violent convulsions: the whole world was frenzied. The planet seemed to be shaken and no longer capable of existence. The horrible degree of wickedness which pagan society had reached, the extravagances of Nero, his Golden House, his insensate art, his colossal statues, his gigantic portraits more than a hundred feet high, had literally sent the world mad. Visitations of nature happened on all sides and kept men's souls in a state of terror.

When one reads the Apocalypse without knowing its date, or possessing a key to its meaning, such a book appears the work of the most capricious and personal fantasy; but when the strange vision is replaced in that interregnum between Nero and Vespasian, during which the Empire went through the gravest crisis in its history, one finds the work in marvellous accord with the spiritual state of the time, we might add with the state of the earth; for we shall soon see how some of its elements were suggested by the physical history of the world at the same epoch. The world was intoxicated with miracles; never had men's minds been so greatly occupied with auguries. It seemed as though God the Father had veiled his face; unclean phantoms, monsters escaped from some mysterious slime, appeared to wander through the air. All men believed themselves on the eve of something without precedent. Faith in the signs of the times and in wonders was universal; there were scarce a few hundred persons of education who saw the vanity of it all. Charlatans, more or less authentic depositaries of the old Babylonian chimeras, exploited the people's ignorance and pretended to interpret prognostics. These miserable wretches became persons of importance; time was spent in expelling and recalling them. Otho and Vitellius especially were entirely given over to them. The highest political thinkers did not disdain to take these puerile dreams into account.

One of the most important branches of Babylonian divination was the interpretation of monstrous births, which

were held to provide fore-warnings of coming events. This idea had, more than any other, invaded the Roman world ; foeti with several heads were above all regarded as significant omens, each head, according to a symbolism which we are to find adopted by the author of the Apocalypse, representing an emperor. The same was the case for hybrid forms, or what were represented to be such. In this respect, also, the unhealthy visions and incoherent imagery of the Apocalypse are the reflection of the popular legends which filled men's minds. A pig with the talons of a hawk was considered the perfect image of Nero. Nero himself was deeply interested in these monstrosities.

Meteors and signs in the heavens also fascinated people greatly. Meteorites made the greatest impression. It is a well-known fact that frequency of meteorites is a periodical phenomenon occurring nearly every thirty years. At such times there are nights when the stars seem literally to be falling from heaven. Comets, eclipses, mock-suns, northern lights, in which people fancied they saw crowns and swords and streaks of blood ; warm vapours of plastic form, in which were pictured battles and fantastic animals, were eagerly noticed and seem never to have had so much intensity as during these tragic years. Men spoke of nothing save showers of blood, the astounding effects of thunder, rivers reascending their courses, streams tinged with gore. A thousand circumstances, which in ordinary times attract no attention, acquired from the feverish emotion of the public an exaggerated importance. The infamous charlatan, Balbillus, turned to his own uses the impression sometimes made on the Emperor by these phenomena to excite his suspicions against the most illustrious of his subjects, and draw from him the most cruel commands.

The scourges of the age, indeed, justified these insanities up to a certain point. Blood flowed in torrents on every side. The death of Nero, in so many respects a deliverance, inaugurated a period of civil wars. The strife of the Gaulish legions under Vindex and Verginius had been frightful ; Galilee was the scene of a war of extermination without



precedent; Corbulo's campaign among the Parthians had been of a very murderous description. Still worse was anticipated in the future; the fields of Bedriacum and Cremona were soon to smoke with blood. Tortures made the amphitheatres so many hells. The cruelty of military and civil customs had banished all pity from the world. Withdrawn, trembling, into the depths of their places of refuge, the Christians were already, no doubt, repeating the words attributed to Jesus.

And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be not troubled: these things must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: there shall be earthquakes in divers places; there shall be famines: these things are the beginning of travail.<sup>1</sup>

Famine, in fact, was added to massacre. In the year 68 the imports from Alexandria were insufficient. At the beginning of March 69, an inundation of the Tiber had very disastrous effects. A sudden inroad of the sea left Lycia in mourning. In 65 a horrible plague afflicted Rome, and during the autumn thirty thousand deaths were counted. In the same year the world sustained the terrible conflagration at Lyons, and Campania was swept by water-spouts and cyclones, the ravages of which extended to the very gates of Rome. The order of nature seemed reversed. Frightful storms spread universal terror.

But it was earthquakes which had the profoundest effect on the popular mind. The globe was passing through a convulsion similar to that of the moral world; it seemed as though the earth and the human race were simultaneously enfevered. It is the characteristic of popular movements to confuse together all that is exciting the multitude's imagination at the moment of accomplishment. A natural phenomenon, a great crime, a number of accidents without apparent connection, are linked and blended together in the great rhapsody which is composed from century to century by mankind. Thus it is that the history of Christianity has incorporated in itself all that at different epochs has aroused

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiii. 7-9.

popular emotion. In it Nero and Solfatara have as much importance as theological reasoning; a place must be accorded to geology and the catastrophes of the planet. Of all natural phenomena, moreover, earthquakes are those which most cause man to humiliate himself before the unknown powers; in the countries in which they occur most frequently, such as Naples and Central America, superstition is endemic, and as much must be said of the centuries in which they raged with peculiar violence. Now they were never more common than in the first century. There was not in the memory of man a time at which the surface of the old world had been in such violent agitation.

Vesuvius was preparing its terrible eruption of 79. On February 5th, 63, Pompeii was almost engulfed by an earthquake, and a great number of the inhabitants refused to return to it. The volcanic centre of the Bay of Naples, at the time of which we write, was in the neighbourhood of Pozzuoli and Cumæ. Vesuvius was still silent, but the series of small craters which constitute the region to the west of Naples, then called the Phlegræan Plains, showed traces of fire in every direction. Averno, the *Acherusia palus* (Lake Fusaro), Lake Agnano, Solfatara, the small extinct volcanoes of Astroni, Camaldoli, Ischia and Nisida are, nowadays, of somewhat insignificant appearance; from them the traveller carries away an impression rather of grace than of terror. Such was not the feeling of antiquity. These hot air chambers, these far-stretching caverns, these thermal springs, these bubbling fountains, these miasmatic exhalations, these underground murmurs, these gaping mouths (*bocche d'inferno*) vomiting sulphur and fiery vapours, inspired Virgil, and, at the same time, formed one of the essential factors of apocalyptic literature. The Jew who disembarked at Pozzuoli on his way to trade or intrigue at Rome, beheld this land smoking through all its pores and shaken unceasingly, which, he was told, was inhabited in its bowels by giants and phantoms. Solfatara, above all, must have appeared to him as the bottomless pit, or the scarce-closed trap-door of hell. Was not the continuous

jet of sulphurous vapour which escapes from its opening the manifest proof, in his eyes, of the existence of a subterranean lake of fire evidently intended, like the Lake of Pentapolis, for the punishment of sinners? The moral aspect of the country caused him no less astonishment. Baïa was a watering-place, a centre of luxury and pleasure, a site for fashionable country houses, the favourite resort of gay society. Cicero fell in the estimation of serious people by having his villa in the midst of this kingdom of brilliant and dissolute manners. Propertius would not allow his mistress to dwell in the town. Petronius makes it the scene of the debaucheries of Trimalcio. Baïa, Bauli, Cumæ and Misenus witnessed, in fact, all follies and all crimes. The stretch of azure sea, enclosed in the contour of the delightful bay, was the scene of the bloody naval spectacle in which thousands of the victims of the festivals of Caligula and Claudius were engulfed. What reflection could be born in the spirit of the pious Jew or Christian, who fervently prayed for the coming of the world's universal conflagration, at the sight of this nameless spectacle, of these mad structures in the midst of the waves, of these baths which in the eyes of Puritans were objects of horror? One alone. 'Blind that they are!' must they have said to one another; 'their future abode is beneath their feet; they dance on the hell that is to swallow them up.'

Nowhere is such an impression as applied to Pozzuoli, or other places of the same character, expressed in a more striking manner than in the Book of Enoch. According to one of the authors of that strange apocalypse, the abode of the fallen angels is a subterranean valley situated in the west near the 'mount of metals.' This mountain is filled with floods of fire; a sulphurous odour exhales from it, and boiling and sulphurous springs (thermal waters) pour from it, which serve to cure diseases, and near which kings and the mighty ones of the earth abandon themselves to the pursuit of all debaucheries. Fools that they are! Each day they behold the punishment that is being prepared for them, and yet they offer no prayers to God. It may be

that the valley of fire referred to is the Valley of Gehenna to the east of Jerusalem, connected with the hollow of the Dead Sea by the *Wady en-nar* (i.e., 'valley of fire'); and, in that case, the thermal springs are those of Callirhoë, a pleasure resort of the Herods, and of the demon-haunted region of Machero which borders upon it. But, thanks to the elasticity of apocalyptic topography, the baths may also be those of Baïa and Cumæ; in the 'valley of fire' may be recognised the Solfatara of Pozzuoli or the Phlegræan Plains; in the 'mount of metals,' Vesuvius as it was before the eruption of 79. We are soon to see how these strange localities were to inspire the author of the Apocalypse, and how the bottomless pit revealed itself to him ten years before nature, by a singular coincidence, re-opened the crater of Vesuvius. For the people this was no fortuitous circumstance. The fact that the most tragical country in the world, that which had been the scene of the great orgy of the reigns of Caligula, Claudius and Nero, should, at the same time, be the country most entirely delivered over to phenomena, which were then universally held to be infernal, could not be without meaning.

It was not, however, Italy alone, but the whole of the eastern part of the Mediterranean, which was shaken by earthquakes. For two centuries Asia Minor was in a perpetual state of trembling, and the towns were constantly being rebuilt. Certain places, such as Philadelphia, experienced shocks of earthquake nearly every day. Tralles was incessantly crumbling to pieces, and it had been necessary to invent a system of reciprocal support for the houses. In the year 17 occurred the destruction of fourteen towns in the region of the Tmolus and Messogis; it was the most terrible catastrophe of the kind on record up to that date. In the years 23, 33, 37, 46, 51 and 53, there were partial disasters in Greece, Asia and Italy. Thera was going through a period of active eruption, and Antioch was incessantly shaken. Finally, from the year 59, there was hardly more than a year which was not marked by some disaster. In particular, the valley of the Lycus, with its

Christian towns of Laodicæa and Colossæ, was swallowed up in 60. When one considers that precisely in this locality was the centre of millenarian ideas, the heart of the Seven Churches, the cradle of the Apocalypse, one feels convinced that a close connection existed between the revelation of Patmos and the physical perturbations of the earth—so close a connection, indeed, that here we have one of the rare instances which can be cited of a reciprocal influence between the material history of the planet and the history of spiritual development. The impression made by the catastrophes in the valley of the Lycus are, to a like extent, to be found in the Sibylline poems. The Asiatic earthquakes spread universal terror. They were discussed throughout the whole world, and there were very few who in these natural occurrences did not see the signs of an enraged deity.

All this caused, as it were, an atmosphere of gloom which powerfully excited the Christians' imagination. How, at the sight of this putting to confusion of the physical and moral world, could the faithful have abstained from crying with more assurance than ever, Maranatha! Maranatha! —'Our Lord is at hand! our Lord is at hand'? The earth seemed to them to be falling to ruin, and already they believed they saw the kings, and the mighty, and the rich fleeing with the cry, 'Mountains, fall on us; hills, cover us!'

A persistent mental characteristic of the ancient prophets was to make the occurrence of some natural scourge an occasion for announcing the early coming of the 'day of Jehovah.' A passage in Joel, which was applied to Messianic times, gave, as certain prognostics of the great day, signs in heaven and on earth, prophets arising on every hand, rivers of blood and of fire, columns of smoke in the form of palm trees, the sun darkened, the moon bloody. In like manner it was believed that Jesus had foretold earthquakes, famines and plagues as inaugurating the great travail, then, as indications heralding his immediate coming, eclipses, the moon obscured, the stars falling from the firmament, the

whole heavens troubled, the sea roaring, entire populations fleeing in terror, unwitting on what side was death or salvation. Fear thus became an element in every apocalypse, and with it was associated the idea of persecution. It was admitted that the powers of evil were, as their last days approached, to redouble their rage and use their utmost skill to compass the extermination of the saints.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE APOSTLES IN ASIA

It was the province of Asia which was most agitated by these terrors. The Church of Colossæ had received a mortal blow in the catastrophe of the year 60. Hierapolis, although built amidst the strangest outpourings of a volcanic eruption, apparently did not suffer. It was there, perhaps, that the faithful of Colossæ took refuge. From this time everything indicates that Hierapolis was as a city apart. Judaism was publicly professed in it. Inscriptions still existing among the ruins, so marvellously well preserved, of that extraordinary city, mention the annual distributions which had to be made to guilds of workmen on the occasion of 'the feast of unleavened bread' and 'the feast of Pentecost.' Nowhere had good works, charitable institutions, and societies for mutual succour among people of the same trade, so much importance. Orphanages and homes or asylums for children attest a singularly high development of philanthropic care. Philadelphia offered a similar spectacle; there the government officials had become the base of political divisions. A peaceful democracy of craftsmen, in mutual association, paying no attention to politics, was the social form of nearly all these wealthy towns in Asia and Phrygia. Far from being denied the slave, virtue was considered the special characteristic of him who suffers. About the time which we have now reached was born at Hierapolis itself a child, in such poverty that he was sold from his cradle, and thenceforth was only known under the name of the

'purchased slave,' *Epictetos*, a name which, thanks to him, has grown to be the synonym of virtue itself. One day, from his teaching was to emerge that admirable book which is the manual of strong souls to whom the supernatural elements of the Gospel are repugnant, who believe that duty is perverted if it be dowered with another charm than that of its own austerity.

In the eyes of Christianity, Hierapolis had a claim to honour far surpassing that of having given birth to Epictetus. It granted hospitality to one of the few survivors of the first Christian generation, to one of those who had seen Jesus, the apostle Philip. It may be supposed that Philip came to Asia after the times of crisis which made it impossible for peaceable folk to live in Jerusalem and drove the Christians from it. Asia was the province in which the Jews enjoyed most tranquillity; and they streamed into it in great numbers. At the same time communication between Rome and Hierapolis was easy and regular. Philip was a man of priestly rank and of the old school, somewhat similar to James. Miracles were attributed to him, even raising from the dead. He had had four daughters, who were all prophetesses. It seems that one was dead before Philip arrived in Asia. Of the three others, two grew old in virginity, while the fourth married in her father's lifetime, prophesied like her sisters, and died at Ephesus. These singular women achieved great celebrity in Asia. Papias, who about the year 130 was Bishop of Hierapolis, knew them, but never saw the apostle himself. From these aged inspired women he heard of their father's miracles, of his extraordinary deeds and wonderful narrations. They also knew many things concerning other apostles and men of apostolic rank, Joseph Barsabas especially, who, according to their account, had drunk a mortal poison without experiencing any bad effects.

Thus, by John's side, there grew up in Asia a second centre of authority and apostolic tradition. John and Philip raised the land which they had chosen as their place of sojourn almost to the level of Judæa. 'These two great

stars of Asia,' as they were called, formed for some years the beacon lights of the Church, deprived as it was of its other pastors. Philip died at Hierapolis and was buried there. His virgin daughters reached a very advanced age, and were laid near him; she who was married was buried at Ephesus. All their sepulchres were, it is said, to be seen in the second century. Hierapolis thus had its own apostolic tombs to rival those of Ephesus. The province seemed ennobled by these sacred bodies, which men imagined they would see rising from their graves on the day on which the Lord should come, in glory and majesty, to call his chosen from the dead.

The Judæan crisis, by dispersing, about 68, the apostles and men of apostolic rank, may also have brought to Ephesus and the valley of the Meander other important members of the infant Church. In any case, a very large number of disciples who had seen the apostles at Jerusalem, resorted to Asia, and seem there to have led that life of wandering from town to town which was so much to Jewish taste. Perhaps the mysterious persons called *Presbyteros Johannes* and Aristion were among the emigrants. These hearers of the twelve spread throughout Asia the tradition of the Church of Jerusalem, and succeeded in giving Judeo-Christianity the preponderance. They were eagerly questioned on the sayings of the apostles and the actual words of Jesus. Later, those who had seen them were so proud of having been able to drink at this pure source, that they disdained the short narratives which purported to record the sayings of Jesus.

There was something extremely singular in the spiritual condition of these Churches, lost in the depths of a province whose tranquil climate and cloudless skies seemed favourable to the growth of mysticism. Nowhere else did Messianic ideas so greatly exercise the souls of men. They were given over to extravagant calculations. The strangest parables proceeding from the traditions of Philip and John were propagated. There were mythical and peculiar elements in the Gospel which grew up in this district.

A general belief was that, after the resurrection of the bodies, there would be a corporeal reign of Christ on earth which would last for a thousand years. The delights of this Paradise were described in an entirely materialistic fashion; the size of grapes and the strength of swords under the Messianic *régime* were reduced to measurement. The idealism which gave the simplest words of Jesus so soft a charm was for the most part entirely lost.

John at Ephesus waxed greater in importance day by day. His supremacy was recognised throughout the province, save perhaps at Hierapolis, where Philip resided. The Churches of Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicæa had adopted him as their head, and respectfully listened to his warnings, counsels, and reproaches. The apostle, or those who claimed to speak for him, generally took an austere tone. Great severity, extreme intolerance, harsh and rough language towards such as thought differently from himself, appear to have been among John's characteristics. It was with him in view, it is said, that Jesus laid down the principle: 'He that is not against us is for us.'<sup>1</sup> The series of anecdotes which were told later, to exhibit his gentleness and indulgence, seem to have been invented, so as to conform to the type represented in the Johannic epistles—epistles the authenticity of which is more than doubtful. A character of entirely different attributes, which reveal much violence, is more in accord with the Gospel narratives and the Apocalypse, and proves that the hasty temper, which had given him the surname of 'son of thunder,' only grew more embittered with old age. It may be, however, that these good qualities and failings, so sharply opposed to each other, are not so necessarily mutually exclusive as one might think. Religious fanaticism often produces in the same subject the extremes of severity and kindness; a mediæval inquisitor, who was in the habit of having thousands of unhappy beings burned for insignificant subtleties, might be, at the same time, the mildest and, in a sense, the humblest of men.

<sup>1</sup> Mark ix. 40.

It was most especially against the little conventicles of disciples of him who was called the new Balaam that the animosity of John and his followers appears to have been at once keen and profound. Such is the injustice inherent in all factions, such was the passion which filled these sturdy Jewish natures, that probably the disappearance of the 'Destroyer of the Law' was hailed with joyful cries by his opponents, to many of whom the death of this marplot, this unwelcome fellow-worker, must have been a veritable deliverance. We have seen how Paul at Ephesus felt that he was surrounded by enemies; the last discourses in Asia attributed to him are full of mournful presentiments. And we shall find that in the beginning of the year 69, hatred against him was still active. It was then that the controversy was to be hushed; a silence was to fall around his memory. At the moment we have now reached he appears to have had no one to support him, and it was precisely this which afterwards saved him. The reserve, or, if you will, the weakness of his partisans brought about a conciliation; for the most daring ideas end by finding acceptance, providing they can submit long enough without response to the objections of their conservative opponents.

Fury against the Roman Empire, joy for the misfortunes which were falling upon it, the hope of soon seeing it dismembered, formed the dearest thought of all the believers. They sympathised with the Jewish insurrection, and were convinced that the Romans would never completely bring it to an end. The time had now gone by when Paul, and perhaps Peter, preached submission to Roman authority, even attributing to that authority a kind of divine character. The principles of the Jewish enthusiasts regarding refusal to pay taxes, the diabolical origin of all secular power, the idolatry implied in the routine of civil life according to Roman forms, had won the day. It was the natural consequence of persecution; moderate principles had ceased to be applicable. Although less violent than in the year 64, persecution still continued mechanically. Asia was the province in which Nero's fall



had made most impression. The general opinion was that the monster, healed by some Satanic power, was lying in hiding somewhere, and was about to reappear. One can imagine the effect of such rumours on the Christians. Many of the faithful at Ephesus, including perhaps their head, were people who had escaped the great butchery of 64. What! was the horrible Beast, that incarnation of luxury, fatuity, vain-glory, about to return? Even to those who still doubted that Nero was the Antichrist, the thing was clear. In him they saw that monster of iniquity, that antipodes of Jesus, who was to appear on earth to assassinate and persecute before the coming of the light. Nero was the Satan incarnate who was to consummate the slaughter of the saints. Yet a little while and the solemn moment would come. The Christians were the more ready to adopt this idea, since the death of Nero had been in its circumstances too commonplace for an Antiochus such as he; persecutors of his species are accustomed to perish with more display. And it was therefore concluded that a more imposing death was reserved for the enemy of God, which should be inflicted on him in the sight of the whole world and the angels assembled by the Messiah.

This idea, which was to give birth to the Apocalypse, took day by day more circumstantial form; the Christian consciousness had reached the highest pitch of its exaltation, when an occurrence in the islands off the coast of Asia embodied what, up till then, had only been a flight of imagination. A false Nero had just appeared and inspired throughout the provinces of Asia and Achaia a keen feeling of curiosity, hope, or terror. He was, it appears, a slave from Pontus, according to others an Italian of servile condition. He much resembled the deceased emperor; he had his great eyes, his abundant hair, his haggard look, his wild, theatrical-looking head, and, like him, he was able to play the cithara and to sing. The impostor formed a nucleus about him of deserters and vagabonds, ventured on a sea passage to reach Syria and Egypt, and was cast by the tempest on the island of Cythnos, one of the



Cyclades. He made this island the centre of a somewhat active propaganda, added to his band by enlisting some soldiers who were returning from the East, performed sanguinary executions, pillaged merchants, and armed slaves. Emotion ran high, especially among the lower classes, open by reason of their credulity to the most absurd rumours. From the December of 68 this was the one topic of conversation in Asia and Greece. Expectation and terror waxed greater every day; this name, whose celebrity had filled the world, turned men's heads anew and made them believe that what had been seen in the past was as nothing to what was to be seen in the future.

Other events in Asia and the Archipelago, which, for lack of sufficient details, we cannot describe precisely, augmented the agitation still more. An ardent Neronian, who, to his political passion joined the wonder-working power of a sorcerer, openly declared himself, either for the impostor at Cythnos or for the Nero said to be in refuge among the Parthians. He apparently forced peaceable people to recognise Nero; he set up his statues again, and compelled honours to be paid them. At times one might be tempted to believe that a currency was put in circulation with the inscription, *Nero redux*. What is certain is, that the Christians imagined that it was desired to force them to adore the statue of Nero, and that coins, tokens, or stamps bearing the name of 'the Beast,' 'without which one could neither sell nor buy,' caused them insurmountable scruples. Gold, marked with the sign of the great chief of idolaters, burned their hands. It seems that, rather than lend themselves to such acts of apostasy, some of the faithful at Ephesus exiled themselves, and it may be supposed that John was of their number. This incident, for us obscure, plays a great part in the Apocalypse, and was perhaps its original source. 'Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.'<sup>1</sup>

The events in progress at Rome and in Italy justified this state of feverish expectancy. Galba did not succeed in

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xiv. 12.

establishing himself. Until the time of Nero the rights of dynastic legitimacy, created by Julius Cæsar and Augustus, had stifled the thought of any competition for the Empire among the generals; but since these rights had been set aside every military chief could aspire to the heritage of Cæsar. Vindex was dead; Verginius had loyally submitted; Nymphidius Sabinus, Macer, and Fonteius Capito had by their death expiated their rebellious ideas. Nothing, however, had been done. On January 2nd, 69, the German legions proclaim Vitellius, on the 10th Galba adopts Piso, on the 15th Otho is proclaimed at Rome; for some hours there are three Emperors; then in the evening Galba is slain. Faith in the Empire was shaken to its foundation; it was not held credible that Otho could achieve sole power; the hopes of the partizans of the false Nero of Cythnos, and of those who every day imagined they were about to see the Emperor they so greatly regretted returning from beyond the Euphrates, were no longer dissimulated. Then it was (at the end of January 69) that among the Christians of Asia was circulated a symbolical manifesto purporting to be a revelation of Jesus himself. Did the author know of the death of Galba or only foresee it? It is all the more difficult to answer this, because one of the characteristic features of apocalypses is that the writer at times exploits, for the benefit of his alleged prophetic powers, some recent piece of news which he believes known to himself alone. Thus the writer who composed the Book of Daniel appears to have had wind of the death of Antiochus. In the same manner our seer seems to possess special information on the political situation of his age. It is doubtful whether he is acquainted with Otho; he believes that the restoration of Nero will immediately follow the downfall of Galba. To him the latter already appears as a man fore-doomed. We are thus on the eve of the Beast's return. The author's ardent imagination then opens before him a series of visions on 'the things which must shortly come to pass,'<sup>1</sup> and forthwith are unrolled the successive

<sup>1</sup> Revelation i. 1.

chapters of a prophetic book whose purpose is to enlighten the minds of the faithful in the crisis through which they are now passing, to reveal to them the meaning of a political situation which troubles the souls of the strongest, and, above all, to reassure them of the fate of their brethren already slain. It must indeed be remembered that the credulous sectaries, whose feelings we strive to reconstruct, were a thousand leagues from the ideas concerning the immortality of the soul that proceeded from Greek philosophy. The martyrdoms of these latter years formed a terrible crisis for a body of people who trembled naïvely when a saint died, and asked each other whether he would see the kingdom of God. An imperative need was felt for representing the faithful as secure in their graves and already happy, although with a temporary happiness, in the midst of the scourges which were to fall upon the earth. Their cries for vengeance were heard, their holy impatience understood; there were prayers that the day might come when God should at last arise to avenge his chosen.

The form adopted by the author for his Apocalypse was not new in Israel. Ezekiel had already inaugurated a considerable change in the old prophetic style, and, in a sense, he may be regarded as the creator of the apocalyptic method. In the place of fervent preaching, at times accompanied by extremely simple allegories, he had substituted, doubtless under the influence of Assyrian art, the 'vision,' that is to say, a complicated symbolism in which the abstract idea was conveyed by means of chimerical beings, conceived with absolute disregard of reality. Zachariah carried on the same tradition; the 'vision' became the necessary setting of all prophetic teaching. It was the author of the Book of Daniel who at last, by the extraordinary popularity which he won, definitely fixed the formal rules of this style. The Book of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, and certain of the Sibylline Poems, were the fruit of his powerful initiative. The prophetic instinct of the Semites, their tendency to group facts together with reference to a certain philosophy of history, and to present their

thought under the form of a divine absolute principle, their aptitude for observing the future's great lines of development, found singular facilities in a fantastic framework of this nature. Thenceforth, at every critical situation of the people of Israel, there was a corresponding apocalypse ready. The persecution of Antiochus, the Roman occupation, the secular rule of Herod, had raised up ardent visionaries. It was inevitable that Nero's reign and the siege of Jerusalem should have their apocalyptic protest, as later the severities of Domitian, Hadrian, Severus Septimus, and Decius, and the Gaulish invasion in 250 were to provoke theirs.

The author of this strange work, which a still stranger fate destined to such diverse interpretations, wrote it mysteriously, invested it with the whole weight of the Christian conscience, and then addressed it under the form of an epistle to the seven principal Churches of Asia. He asked that it should be read, as was the custom with all the apostolic epistles, to the assembled faithful. In this procedure, perhaps, there was an imitation of Paul, who preferred to act rather by letter than from near at hand. Such communications, in any case, were far from being rare, and the coming of the Lord was invariably their theme. Alleged revelations of the nearness of the last day, bearing the names of various apostles, were so widely circulated, that Paul found himself compelled to warn his Churches against the improper use that might be made of his writings to support such frauds. The work under consideration commences with a title explaining its origin and lofty import.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST, WHICH GOD GAVE HIM TO SHOW UNTO HIS SERVANTS, EVEN THE THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY COME TO PASS: AND HE SENT AND SIGNIFIED IT BY HIS ANGEL UNTO HIS SERVANT JOHN; WHO BARE WITNESS OF THE WORD OF GOD, AND OF THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST, EVEN OF ALL THINGS THAT HE SAW.

*Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*

JOHN to the seven Churches which are in Asia : Grace to you and peace, from him which is and which was and which is to come ; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne ; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood ; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father ; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Behold, he cometh with the clouds ; and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him ; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty.

I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet saying, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven Churches ; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks ; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow ; and his eyes were as a flame of fire ; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace ; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars : and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword : and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not ; I am the first and the last, and the Living one ; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter ; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches : and the seven candlesticks are seven Churches.<sup>1</sup>

In the half gnostic, half cabalistic conceptions prevalent among the Jews about this time, every individual, and even every moral being, such as death and pain, had a guardian angel ; there was the angel of Persia, the angel of Greece, the angel of the waters, the angel of fire, the angel of the abyss. It was therefore natural that each Church should

<sup>1</sup> Revelation i.



also have its heavenly representative. It is to this *ferouer* or *genius* of each community that the Son of Man in turn addresses his warnings.

To the angel of the Church of Ephesus :—

These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlestieks.

I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which eall themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false ; and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches. To him that overcome, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

To the angel of the Church of Smyrna :—

These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and lived again.

I know thy tribulation and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer : behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried ; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches. He that overcome shall not be hurt of the second death.

To the angel of the Church of Pergamum :—

These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword.

I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is : and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. Repent therefore ; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.



To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

To the angel of the Church of Thyatira :—

These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass.

I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first. But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess ; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time that she should repent ; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. Behold, I do cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works. And I will kill her children with death ; and all the Churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts : and I will give unto each one of you according to your works. But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, which know not the deep things of Satan, as they say ; I cast upon you none other burden. Howbeit that which ye have, hold fast till I come.

And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations : and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers ; as I also have received of my Father : and I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.

To the angel of the Church of Sardis :—

These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars :

I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. Be thou watchful, and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die ; for I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear ; and keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. But thou hast a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments ; and they shall walk with me in white : for they are worthy.

He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments ; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.

To the angel of the Church of Philadelphia :—

These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and none shall shut, and that shutteth, and none openeth : I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie ; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. I come quickly : hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown.

He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more : and I write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.

#### To the angel of the Church of Laodicæa :—

These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot : I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked ; I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich ; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest ; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I reprove and chasten ; be zealous therefore, and repent.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me. He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.

Who is this John, that dares to make himself the interpreter of heavenly mandates, that addresses the Churches of Asia with so much authority, that boasts of having endured the same persecutions as his readers? It is either the apostle John, or a namesake of the apostle John, or someone who wishes to pass himself off as the apostle John. It is hardly permissible to suppose that in the year 69, in

the apostle John's lifetime, or shortly after his death, anyone would have usurped his name without his consent, to give counsels and reprimands of so personal a nature. Nor among the namesakes of the apostle was there anyone who would have dared to play such a part. The *Presbyteros Johannes*, the only one who has been suggested, was, if indeed he ever lived at all, apparently of a later generation. Without denying the doubts which rest on nearly all these questions as to the authenticity of apostolic writings, owing to the unscrupulous way in which revelations, to which it was desired to lend authority, were attributed to apostles and other holy persons, we consider it probable that the Apocalypse was the work of the apostle John, or, at least, that it was accepted by him and under his patronage addressed to the Churches of Asia. The strong impression of the massacres of 64, the feeling for the dangers which the author has run, the horror of Rome, all seem to us highly appropriate to the apostle who, on our hypothesis, had been in Rome and could say, speaking of those tragic events: *Quorum pars magna fui*. Blood stifles him, blinds him, prevents him from seeing nature. The picture of the monstrosities of Nero's reign weighs upon him as a fixed idea. But grave objections make the task of criticism in this matter a very delicate one. The taste for mystery and apocrypha of the early Christian generations has veiled with impenetrable obscurity all questions of literary history relative to the New Testament. Happily, the soul shines through these anonymous or pseudonymous writings in accents which cannot deceive us. In popular movements it is impossible to discern the share of each individual; it is the general feeling that constitutes the true creative force.

Why has the author of the Apocalypse, whoever he may be, chosen Patmos as the scene of his vision? It is difficult to say. Patmos or Patnos is a small island, nearly twelve miles long but very narrow. In Greek antiquity it was thickly populated and flourishing. In the Roman era it retained all the importance which its small size permitted, thanks to its excellent harbour, formed in the central part

of the island by the isthmus which connects the rocky northern portion with the southern portion. Patmos was, by the practice of the coasting trade of the time, the first or the last port of call for the traveller journeying from Ephesus to Rome or from Rome to Ephesus, as the case might be. It is an error to represent it as a mere rock or desert. Patmos was, and perhaps will become again, one of the most important commercial ports in the Archipelago; for it lies at the junction of several trade routes. In the event of Asia Minor reviving, Patmos would be for it something analogous to what Syra is for modern Greece, to what, in antiquity, Delos and Rhenea were among the Cyclades—a kind of mart for the mercantile marine, a useful meeting-place for travellers.

It was probably to the latter circumstance that this little island owed the choice that in later years gave it such high Christian fame; whether the apostle had to retire to it in order to escape some persecuting measure of the authorities at Ephesus; whether, returning from Rome, and on the eve of seeing his faithful once more, he prepared in one of the *cauponæ*, which must have bordered on the harbour, the manifesto by which he wished to be preceded in Asia; whether, taking as it were a step backward so as to strike a great blow, and considering that the scene of the vision could not be laid at Ephesus itself, he chose this isle in the Archipelago, which, at about a day's distance, was in daily communication with the metropolis of Asia; whether he had kept in memory his last passing visit, crowded with emotions, in 64; or whether, finally, it was simply some accident at sea which compelled him to wait for some days in the little port. Navigation in the Archipelago is full of risks, of which ocean voyages can give no idea; for in the seas familiar to us there are constant winds which second one's efforts even when they are contrary. In those regions there are by turn absolute calms and, when one is involved in narrow straits, obstinate gales. Nowhere is the seaman master of himself; he touches where he can and not where he wishes.

Men so ardent as those bitter and fanatical descendants of the old prophets of Israel, bore their imagination wherever they went, and this imagination was so strictly enclosed within the circle of ancient Hebrew poetry, that their natural surroundings did not exist for them. Patmos resembles all the islands of the Archipelago; azure sea, limpid atmosphere, cloudless skies, rocks with jagged summits occasionally covered with a light coating of verdure. Nature's aspect is barren and sterile; but the forms and tints of the cliffs, the vivid blue of the sea on which float beautiful white birds, forming a striking contrast in colour to the reddish hue of the rocks, make an admirable landscape. These myriads of islands and islets of every form, which emerge like pyramids or shields from the waters, and dance their eternal round on the horizon, seem as it were the fairy world of a cycle of sea-gods and ocean nymphs, leading a glorious life of love and youth and melancholy in grottoes of glaucous green, on clear river banks, by turn gracious and terrible, luminous and sombre. Calypso and the sirens, the Tritons and Nereids, the perilous charm of the sea, her caresses at once voluptuous and sinister, all those subtle sensations which find their supreme expression in the *Odyssey*, escaped the gloomy visionary. Two or three points alone, such as the great influence of the sea and the image of 'a great mountain burning with fire cast into the sea,' which seems suggested by Thera, have any local origin. Of a little isle, fit to serve as a background to the delightful romance of *Daphnis and Chloë* or to scenes of pastoral life like those of *Theocritus* and *Moschus*, he makes a black volcano choked with fire and ashes. And yet he must have drunk in more than once on these waters the serene silence of nights when one hears naught save the murmurings of the halcyon, and the hollow breathing of the dolphin. For whole days he looked on Mount Mycalus without dreaming of the victory gained by the Greeks over the Persians, the finest victory ever won after Marathon and Thermopylæ. In this place, the centre of all great Greek creations, at a few leagues' distance from Samos, Cos, Miletus,



and Ephesus, he dreamed of other things than the mighty genius of Pythagoras, of Hippocrates, of Thales, and of Heraclitus ; for him the glorious memories of Greece had no existence. The poem of Patmos should rather have been some *Hero and Leander*, or else a pastoral in the manner of Longus, narrating the sports of beautiful child-like beings on the threshold of love. The gloomy enthusiast, thrown by chance on these Ionian shores, did not emerge from his biblical memories. Nature for him was represented by the living chariot of Ezekiel, the monstrous *cherub*, the misshapen bull of Nineveh, a whole uncouth animal world putting statuary and painting at defiance. That strange failing of Orientals' eyes, which distorts the images of things, and causes all the figured representations that come from their hands to seem fantastic and void of the spirit of life, in him reached its zenith. The malady which preyed on his inward parts tinged everything with its colours. He saw with the eyes of Ezekiel and of the author of the Book of Daniel ; or rather he saw naught save himself, his passions, his hopes, his outbursts of wrath. A vague and arid mythology, which was already assuming a cabalistic and gnostic form, entirely based on the transformation of abstract ideas into divine hypostases, barred him from the plastic conditions of art. Never did a man more remotely isolate himself from his environment ; never was there a man who more openly abjured the world of the senses, to substitute for the harmonies of real existence the contradictory chimera of a new earth and a new heaven.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE APOCALYPSE

AFTER the foreword to the seven Churches the course of the vision is unrolled. A door is opened in heaven; and the seer, rapt in spirit, throws through this opening a gaze that penetrates to the very extremity of the celestial court. The whole heaven of the Jewish Cabala is revealed to him. There is a single throne set up, and on this throne, which has a rainbow round about it, is seated God himself, like a gigantic ruby casting forth fiery gleams. Around the throne are four and twenty lesser seats, on which sit four and twenty elders arrayed in white, with crowns of gold on their heads. It is mankind, represented by a senate of the chosen, which forms the permanent court of the Eternal. In front burn seven lamps, which are the seven spirits of God (the seven gifts of divine wisdom), and round about are four monsters, the features of which are derived from the *cherubim* of Ezekiel and the *seraphim* of Isaiah. These have, the first the form of a lion, the second that of a calf, the third that of a man, the fourth that of an eagle with outspread wings. In Ezekiel these four monsters had already personified the attributes of the Deity, 'wisdom, power, omniscience, and creation.' They have six wings, and their bodies are entirely covered with eyes. The angels, creatures inferior to the great supernatural personifications just mentioned, are, as it were, winged retainers, and surround the throne in thousands of thousands, myriads of myriads. An eternal roll of thunder comes from the throne. In the foreground extends an immense azure

surface as of crystal (the firmament). A kind of divine liturgy goes on ceaselessly. The four monsters, organs of universal life (nature), never sleep, and sing night and day the heavenly trisagion: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, which was, and which is, and which is to come.'<sup>1</sup> The four and twenty elders (mankind) join in this chant, casting themselves down and laying their crowns at the foot of the throne on which sits the Creator.

Christ, up till now, has not figured in the heavenly court. The seer is to make us spectators of the ceremony of his enthronement. On the right of him that sits on the throne is to be seen a book in the form of a roll, written within and without, and sealed with seven seals. It is the book of divine mysteries, the great revelation. None, either in heaven or on earth, is found worthy to open it, or even to look at it. At this John begins to weep; the future, that sole consolation of the Christian, is not, then, to be revealed to him. One of the elders bids him be of good cheer. As a matter of fact, he who must open the book is soon found; one easily guesses that it is Jesus. In the very midst of the great heavenly host, at the foot of the throne, in the midst of the animals and the elders, on the crystalline surface, appears a slain lamb. This was the favourite image in which the Christian imagination loved to represent Jesus: a slain lamb, the Paschal victim, for ever with God. He has seven horns and seven eyes symbolizing the seven spirits of God, which Jesus has received in all their fulness, and which he is to spread abroad upon the earth. The Lamb arises, goes straight to the throne of the Eternal, and takes the book. Then a mighty emotion fills the whole of heaven; the four animals and the twenty-four elders fall on their knees before the Lamb, holding in their hands harps and golden bowls of incense (the prayers of the saints), and singing a new song: 'Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be

<sup>1</sup> Revelation iv. 8.

unto our God a kingdom and priests ; and they reign upon the earth.’<sup>1</sup> The myriads of angels join in this chant, and to the Lamb ascribe the seven great prerogatives (power, riches, wisdom, dominion, honour, glory, and blessing). All creatures which are in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth, or in the sea join in the heavenly ceremonial, crying : ‘ Unto him that sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion for ever and ever.’<sup>2</sup> The four animals representing nature say their deep-voiced *Amen*, and the elders fall down and give adoration.

Thus we see Jesus raised to the highest place in the heavenly hierarchy. Not only the angels, but even the twenty-four elders and the four animals, who are higher than the angels, have prostrated themselves at his feet. He has mounted the steps of God’s throne, and has taken the book placed at the right hand of God, which no man can even look upon. He is about to open the seven seals of the book ; the great drama begins.

The opening is brilliant. In accord with an historical conception of the justest kind, the author assigns the origin of the Messianic movement to the moment at which Rome is extending her Empire over Judæa. At the opening of the first seal a white horse rushes forth ; its rider holds a bow in his hand, a crown encircles his brow ; everywhere he carries victory. This is the Roman Empire, against which, up till the time of the seer, no resistance had been possible. But this triumphal prologue is of short duration ; the signs heralding the glorious coming of the Messiah are to be unprecedented scourges, and it is with the most terrible images that the heavenly tragedy continues. We are at the commencement of what was called ‘the travail of the Messiah.’ Each seal opened henceforth brings some horrible misfortune on mankind.

At the opening of the second seal a red horse bursts forth. To him that rides it is given to take peace from the earth and make men slay one another ; in his hand is put a

<sup>1</sup> Revelation v. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 13.

great sword. This is War. Since the Judæan revolt, and more especially since the rebellion of Vindex, the world had indeed been nothing but a field of carnage, and the peace-abiding man knew not where to fly.

At the opening of the third seal a black horse bounds forward, and its rider bears a balance. From the midst of the four animals, the voice which in heaven fixes the price of the necessaries of life for poor mortals, says to the rider : 'A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny ; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not.'<sup>1</sup> This is Famine. Without taking into account the great scarcity which prevailed under Claudius, food in the year 68 was extremely dear.

At the opening of the fourth seal a yellow horse appears. Its rider is called Death ; *Sheol* follows him, and he is given power to slay the fourth part of the earth by the sword, by hunger, by pestilence, and by wild beasts.

Such are the great scourges which announce the early coming of the Messiah. Justice would desire that the divine wrath should, on the instant, be kindled upon the earth. Indeed, on the opening of the fifth seal, the Seer beholds a touching spectacle. Under the altar he sees the souls of those who have been slain for their faith and for the witness they have borne to Christ (surely the victims of 64). These saintly souls cry to God, saying : 'How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth' ?<sup>2</sup> But the time is not yet come ; the number of martyrs which will call down the torrent of wrath is not attained. To each of the victims under the altar is given a white robe, the token of future justification and triumph, and they are bidden to have patience yet a little longer, until their fellow servants and brethren who, like them, are to be slain, have in their turn rendered witness.

After this beautiful interlude, we return, not now to the period of forewarning scourges, but into the midst of the phenomena of the last judgment. At the opening of the

<sup>1</sup> Revelation vi. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 10.

sixth seal there is a great and universal earthquake. The sky becomes black as sackcloth of hair, the moon takes the colour of blood, the stars fall from heaven upon the earth like the fruits of a fig-tree shaken in the wind ; the heavens are rolled up like a scroll ; mountains and islands are cast from their places. The kings and great men of the earth, the military chiefs and the rich and strong, slaves and free men take refuge in caverns and among the rocks, saying to the mountains : ' Fall on us, and save us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.'<sup>1</sup>

The great execution is, then, to be carried out. The four angels of the winds take their stand at the four corners of the earth ; they have but to let slip the bridle of the elements confided to their charge for the latter, in their natural fury, to overwhelm the world. All power is given to those executioners, they are at their posts ; but the fundamental idea of the poem is to exhibit the great judgment as being constantly adjourned at the moment when it seems it must take place. An angel, bearing in his hand the seal of God (a seal which bears as its legend, like all kings' seals, the name of him to whom it belongs, ליהוה), rises from the East, and cries to the four angels of the winds of destruction to hold back for some time longer the forces at their command, until the chosen now alive have been marked on the forehead with the seal, which, like the blood of the Paschal lamb in Egypt, will preserve them from the scourges. The angel then places the divine mark on 144,000 persons belonging to the twelve tribes of Israel. This must not be taken to mean that these 144,000 chosen are Jews alone. Here Israel certainly means the true spiritual Israel, the 'Israel of God,' as St Paul says,<sup>2</sup> the chosen family embracing all those who have attached themselves to the race of Abraham, by faith in Jesus and the practice of the essential rites. But there is one class among the faithful which has already been brought into the sojourn of peace, those who have suffered death for Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> Revelation vi. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians vi. 16.

The prophet sees them under the form of an innumerable multitude of men of every race, of every tribe, of every people, of every tongue, standing before the throne and before the Lamb clad in white robes, bearing palms in their hands, and singing to the glory of God and of the Lamb. One of the elders explains to him what this multitude is:—

These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.<sup>1</sup>

The seventh seal is opened, and the great spectacle of the consummation of the ages is awaited. But in the poem, as in reality, this catastrophe is ever elusive; the time is believed to have come, but nothing happens. In place of the final *dénouement* which ought to follow the opening of the seventh seal, there is a silence in heaven for the space of half-an-hour, indicating that the first act of the mystery is at an end, and that another is about to begin.

After the sacramental silence the seven archangels before the throne of God, who up till now have not taken part, enter on the scene. Seven trumpets are given to them, each of which is to serve as a signal for other portents. John's gloomy imagination was not satisfied; this time it was the plagues of Egypt that his wrath against the profane world was to ask for types of punishments. Natural phenomena which occurred about the year 68 and greatly exercised popular opinion, offered him apparent justification for such comparisons.

Before, however, the incident of the seven trumpets begins, a highly effective scene in dumb show takes place. An angel advances toward the golden altar before the throne, bearing in his hand a golden censer. Masses of incense are thrown on the fire on the altar and arise

<sup>1</sup> Revelation vii. 14-17.



in smoke before the Eternal. Then the angel fills his censer with coals of fire from the altar and casts them upon the earth. As the fire lights upon the earth, it causes thunders and lightnings and voices and earthquakes. The incense, as the author himself tells us, is the prayers of the saints. The sighs of these holy men rising silently before God, and appealing for the destruction of the Roman Empire, become for the profane world burning fuel which shakes it to its foundations, and rends it asunder, and consumes it, without its knowing whence the blows proceed.

Then the seven angels prepare to put the trumpets to their lips.

At the blast of the first angel's trumpet, a hail mingled with fire and blood falls upon the earth, a third part of the earth is burned and a third part of the trees; every green herb is consumed. In 63, 68, and 69 great terror was, as a matter of fact, caused by storms in which men saw the hand of a supernatural power.

At the sound of the second angel's trumpet, a great burning mountain is cast into the sea. A third part of the sea is changed into blood, a third part of the fish die, a third part of the ships are destroyed. Here we have an allusion to the resemblance of the isle of Thera, which the prophet could almost perceive on the horizon from Patmos, to a submerged volcano. A new isle had appeared in the middle of its crater in 46 or 47. At times of volcanic activity, flames are to be seen on the surface of the sea in the neighbourhood of Thera.

At the sound of the third angel's trumpet, a great star falls from heaven, burning like a torch, and affects a third part of the rivers and springs. Its name is 'Wormwood'; a third part of the waters change into wormwood (that is to say, become bitter and poisonous) and many die from drinking from them. One is inclined to take this for an allusion to some meteor, the fall of which was connected with an infection which might have been produced in the water of some reservoir and have affected its quality. It must be

remembered that our prophet sees nature through the simple legends related in popular conversation in Asia, the most credulous land in the world. Phlegon of Tralles, half a century later, was to spend his life in compiling absurdities of this description. Tacitus, on every page, shows his interest in them.

At the sound of the fourth angel's trumpet, the third part of the sun, the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars are darkened, so that the third part of the light is obscured. This may be referred either to the eclipses which filled these years with terror, or to the awful storm of January 10th, 69.

But these scourges are as nothing to what is to come. An eagle, flying to the zenith, utters three cries of woe, and announces to men unheard-of calamities for the three trumpet blasts still remaining.

At the sound of the fifth trumpet, a star (that is to say, an angel) falls from heaven, to whom is given the key of the pit of the abyss (hell). The angel opens the pit of the abyss, and there comes from it a smoke like that of a great furnace. The sun and the air are darkened. From this smoke are born locusts which cover the earth like squadrons of cavalry. These locusts led by their king, the angel of the abyss, who is in Hebrew called Abaddon and in Greek, Apollyon, torment men for five months (a whole summer). It is possible that, about this time, a plague of locusts may have been at its height in some province; in any case the imitation of the plagues of Egypt is here evident. The pit of the abyss is perhaps the Solfatara of Pozzuoli (which was called the 'Forum of Vulcan') or the ancient crater of Somma, which were regarded as vomitories of hell. We have pointed out that the state of physical phenomena in the neighbourhood of Naples was then very violent. The author of the Apocalypse, to whom we may be permitted to ascribe a journey to Rome, and consequently to Pozzuoli, may have been a witness of such phenomena. He connects the clouds of locusts with volcanic exhalations; for the

origin of these clouds being obscure, the popular mind was inclined to attribute it to infernal agencies. To this day, indeed, such phenomena still occur at Solfatara. After heavy rain, the pools of water which remain in places where the soil is hot, cause the extremely rapid and abundant breeding of locusts and frogs. That these apparently spontaneous generations should be vulgarly regarded as emanations from the mouth of hell itself was so much the more natural, in that eruptions, usually being followed by heavy rains which cover the country with pools, must have seemed the immediate cause of the clouds of insects which emerged from these pools.

The blast of the sixth trumpet calls down yet another scourge—the invasion of the Parthians, which was universally believed to be imminent. A voice comes from the four horns of the altar before God, commanding that the four angels who are chained on the banks of the Euphrates shall be released. The four angels (perhaps the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians), who are ready for the hour, the day, the month, the year, put themselves at the head of a terrible army of horsemen, two hundred million strong. The description of the horses and their riders is entirely fantastic. The horses, which deal death with their tails, are probably an allusion to the Parthian cavalry which discharged darts while flying. A third part of mankind is exterminated. Nevertheless those who survive do not repent. They continue to worship devils and idols of gold and silver which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk. They are stubborn in their murders and sorceries and fornications and thefts.

We await the blast of the seventh trumpet, but here, as in the act devoted to the opening of the seals, the seer appears to hesitate, or rather to contrive to keep expectancy in suspense; he stops at the solemn moment. The awful secret cannot yet be disclosed in entirety. A gigantic angel, his head encircled with a rainbow, one foot on the earth, the other on the sea, whose voice is echoed by

seven thunders, speaks mysterious words, which a voice from heaven forbids John to write down. Then the gigantic angel raises his hand towards heaven and swears by the Eternal that there shall be no longer delay, and that at the sound of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God, announced by his prophets, shall be accomplished.

The apocalyptic drama is thus about to end. To prolong his book, the author ascribes to himself a new prophetic mission. Repeating a vigorous piece of symbolism already used by Ezekiel, John describes how the gigantic angel presents him with a book of prophecy which he devours. A voice says to him: 'Thou must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.'<sup>1</sup> The scheme of the vision, which the seventh trumpet was to bring to a close, is thus enlarged, and the author reserves for himself a second part, in which he proceeds to disclose his views on the destinies of contemporary kings and peoples. The six first trumpet blasts, in fact, like the openings of the first six seals, relate to circumstances which had already occurred when the author wrote. What follows, on the other hand, relates for the greater part to the future.

It is on Jerusalem, in the first instance, that the seer turns his gaze. By a sufficiently clear symbolism he gives his readers to understand that the city is to be delivered over to the Gentiles; to perceive this in the early months of 69 required no great prophetic effort. Even the Portico and the Court of the Gentiles are soon to be trodden by the feet of the profane; but the imagination of a Jew so fervent could not conceive the destruction of the Temple, since the Temple was the sole spot on earth where God could receive worship (a worship of which that of heaven is but a reproduction). John does not imagine the earth without the Temple. The Temple, then, is to be preserved, and the faithful, marked on the forehead with the seal of Jehovah, will continue to be able to worship therein. Thus the Temple will be, as it were, a sacred precinct, the spiritual

<sup>1</sup> Revelation x. 11.

home of the whole Church ; and this state of things will last for forty-two months, that is to say, for three years and a half (a half *schemitta*, or week of years). We shall find this mystical number, borrowed from the Book of Daniel, recurring several times in what follows. It is the length of time which the world has still to live.

Jerusalem, during this period, is to be the scene of a great religious battle, similar to the struggles which have at all times crowded her history. God will give a mission to 'his two witnesses,' who will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days (*i.e.*, three years and a half), clad in sack-cloth. These two prophets are compared to two olive trees and two candlesticks standing before the Lord. They shall have the powers of a Moses and an Elias ; they shall be able to shut up the heavens and prevent rain, to change water into blood, and to strike the earth with whatever plague they will. If anyone attempts to do them hurt, a fire shall come forth from their mouths and devour their enemies. When they shall have finished their testimony, the Beast that comes up out of the abyss (the Roman power, or rather Nero reappearing as the Antichrist) shall slay them. For three days and a half their bodies shall remain stretched without sepulchre in the public streets of the great city, which is called symbolically Sodom and Egypt, where their master has been crucified. Worldly folk will rejoice, and send each other congratulations and gifts ; for these two prophets shall have become insupportable to them by their stern preaching and the terrible wonders they have wrought. But at the end of three days and a half the spirit of life enters anew into the two saints ; they stand on their feet, and a great fear seizes on all those who behold them. Soon they mount up to heaven on the clouds, in the sight of their foes. A frightful earthquake takes place at the same moment ; a tenth part of the city falls down ; seven thousand men are killed ; the others, terror-stricken, are converted.

We have several times already encountered the idea that the solemn hour is to be preceded by the appearance



of two witnesses, who, most frequently, are conceived of as being Enoch and Elias in person. These two friends of God were reputed indeed not to be dead. The former was believed to have vainly prophesied the Flood to his fellow-men who would not listen to him ; he was the pattern of a Jew preaching penitence among pagans. Sometimes also the witnesses have a resemblance to Moses, whose death had in like manner been involved in mystery, and to Jeremiah. In addition, our author apparently thinks of the two witnesses as being two important members of the Church of Jerusalem, two apostles of great holiness, who will be put to death and will then rise from the dead and mount up to heaven like Elias and Jesus. It is not impossible that the first part of the vision may have a retrospective value, and relate to the murder of the two James's, more especially to the death of James, brother of the Lord, which was considered by many at Jerusalem as a public misfortune, a fatal event, a sign of the times. As to the conviction that the end will not come before the Jews are converted, it was one which was general among the Christians ; we have similarly found it in St Paul.

The rest of Israel having arrived at the true faith, the world has nothing more to do than end. The seventh angel puts the trumpet to his lips. At the sound of this last trumpet great voices cry aloud : 'The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.'<sup>1</sup> The twenty-four elders fall on their faces and give worship. They thank God for having inaugurated his kingship in spite of the impotent rage of the Gentiles, and proclaim the hour of recompense for the saints and extermination for those who corrupt the earth. Then the gates of the heavenly Temple are opened, and in its midst is to be seen the ark of the new covenant. This scene is accompanied by earthquakes, thunders, and lightnings.

The consummation of all things has come. The faithful have received the great revelation which is to console them.

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xi. 15.



The day of judgment is at hand ; it will take place in half a sacred year's time, equivalent to three years and a half. But we have already noticed how the author, with little regard for the unity of his work, reserves expedients for continuing it when it seemed finished. We are, in fact, only half way through the book ; a new series of visions is to be unrolled before us.

The first is one of the most beautiful. In the midst of heaven appears a woman (the Church of Israel) arrayed with the sun, the moon beneath her feet, and about her head a crown of twelve stars (the twelve tribes of Israel). She cries out as though with the pains of childbirth, pregnant as she is with the Messianic ideal. Before her stands an enormous red Dragon with seven crowned heads and ten horns, whose tail, sweeping through the sky, draws down a third part of the stars and casts them upon the earth. This is Satan under the guise of the most potent of his incarnations, the Roman Empire ; his red colour represents the imperial purple ; the seven crowned heads are the seven Cæsars who have reigned up to the time at which the author is writing—Julius Cæsar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero and Galba ; the ten horns are the ten Proconsuls who govern the provinces. The Dragon watches for the birth of the child that he may devour it. The woman is delivered of a son, destined 'to rule all the nations with a rod of iron,'<sup>1</sup> and this child (Jesus) is taken up to heaven by God. God places him beside him on his throne. The woman flees to the desert, where God has prepared for her a refuge in which she will remain for twelve hundred and sixty days.—There is evidently an allusion here, either to the flight of the Church of Jerusalem and the peace which it is to enjoy within the walls of Pella for the three years and a half which are to elapse before the end of the world, or to the asylum found by the Judeo-Christians and some of the apostles in the province of Asia. The 'desert' image suits the former explanation better than the latter. Pella, beyond

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xii. 5.

the Jordan, was a peaceable land near the confines of the Arabian deserts, and the clamours of war scarcely reached it.

There follows a great conflict in heaven. Up till now Satan, the *katigor*, the malevolent critic of creation, has been permitted entrance into the divine court. He has used this favour, in accordance with an old habit which he has not lost since the time of the patriarch Job, to injure pious men, above all, Christians, and draw down upon them frightful misfortunes. The persecutions at Rome and Ephesus have been his work. Now, however, he is to lose his privilege. The archangel Michael (guardian angel of Israel) with his angels gives him battle. Satan is vanquished, hounded from heaven, and cast upon the earth with his imps; a song of triumph bursts forth when the heavenly beings see the downfall of the calumniator, the reviler of all good, who has ceased neither night nor day in accusing and vilifying their brethren below. The Church in heaven and that on earth unite in joy at Satan's defeat. This defeat is due to the blood of the Lamb, and also to the courage of the martyrs who have carried their sacrifice to the point of death. But woe to the profane world! The Dragon has descended into its midst, and all things may be expected from his despair, for he knows that his days are numbered.

The first object on which the Dragon, cast upon the earth, turns his rage is the woman (the Church of Israel), who has given birth to the divine offspring whom God has caused to sit at his right hand. But protection from on high is vouchsafed the woman; she is given two mighty eagle wings, with the aid of which she flies to the place assigned to her in the wilderness, that is to say, to Pella. There she is nourished for three years and a half far from the Dragon's sight. The latter's fury is at its height. From his mouth he vomits forth after the woman a river to drown her and sweep her away, but the earth comes to the woman's rescue. It opens and absorbs the river (an allusion to some circumstance in the flight to Pella which is unknown to us). The

Dragon, seeing his impotence against the woman (the Mother-Church of Israel) turns his fury against 'the rest of her seed,' that is to say, against the Churches of the Dispersion, which observe the precepts of God and are faithful to the testimony of Jesus. Here there is an obvious allusion to the persecutions of latter times, and especially to that of the year 64.

Then the prophet beholds, emerging from the sea, a Beast which, in many points, resembles the Dragon. He has ten horns, seven heads, diadems on his ten horns, and on each of his heads a blasphemous name. His general aspect is that of a leopard, but he has the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion. The Dragon (Satan) gives him his strength, his throne and his power. One of his heads has received a mortal blow, but the wound has been healed. The whole world falls down in wonderment after this mighty animal, and all men set themselves to worship the Dragon for giving power to the Beast. They also adore the Beast, saying, 'Who is like unto the Beast? And who is able to war with him?'<sup>1</sup> And there is given him a mouth speaking with vain-glory and blasphemy, and the duration of his omnipotence is fixed at forty-two months (three years and a half). Then the Beast begins to vomit forth blasphemies against God, against his name, against his tabernacle, and against those that dwell in heaven. And there is given him power to make war upon the saints and conquer them, and authority is granted him over every tribe, every people, every tongue, every race. All men worship him, save those whose names have been written from the beginning of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. 'If any man hath an ear let him hear. If any man is for captivity, into captivity he goeth; if any man shall kill with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.'<sup>2</sup>

This symbol is very clear. In the Sibylline poem written in the second century B.C., the Roman dominion had already been qualified as the power 'with many heads.'

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xiii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xiii. 9, 10.

Allegories derived from polycephalous beasts were then very much in fashion, the fundamental principle in the interpretation of such emblems being that of considering each head to signify a sovereign. The monster of the Apocalypse is, moreover, formed by the union of the attributes of Daniel's four empires, and this alone would go to show that here a new empire, absorbing in itself the previous empires, is in question. The Beast which emerges from the sea is, then, the Roman Empire, which for the people of Palestine seemed to come from beyond the seas. This Empire is only a form of Satan (the Dragon), or rather is Satan himself with all his attributes; it has its authority from Satan, and it employs its whole power in causing the worship of Satan, that is to say, in maintaining idolatry, which, in the author's view, is nothing but the worship of demons. The ten crowned horns are the ten provinces, the proconsuls of which are veritable kings; the seven heads are the seven Emperors who have succeeded each other from Julius Cæsar to Galba; the blasphemous name written on each head is *Σεβαστός* or *Augustus*, which, to severe Jews, appeared to imply an insult to God. The whole earth is by Satan given over to the Empire in return for the homage which the Empire procures for Satan; the grandeur and the pride of Rome, the *Imperium* which she usurps, her divinity the object of both private and public worship, form an unending blasphemy against God, the one true sovereign of the world. The Empire in question is naturally the enemy of the Jews and of Jerusalem. It wages pitiless war on the saints (the author seems, on the whole, favourable to the Jewish revolt), and it will vanquish them; but it has only another three years and a half to endure. As to the head, mortally wounded but with its wound healed, this represents Nero recently overthrown but miraculously saved from death, who is believed to have taken refuge among the Parthians. The adoration of the Beast is the worship of Rome and Augustus, which was current throughout the province of Asia, and formed the basis of the religion of the country.

The symbol which follows is far from being so trans-

parent for us. Another beast comes up out of the earth ; he has two horns like those of a lamb, but he speaks like the Dragon (Satan). He exercises all the power of the first Beast in his presence and under his eyes ; in this respect he fills the part of delegate and puts forth his whole authority in making the dwellers upon earth worship the first Beast 'whose death stroke was healed.'<sup>1</sup> This second beast works great miracles ; he goes so far as to make fire descend from heaven upon the earth in the presence of many spectators, and seduces the world by the wonders which he executes in the name and on behalf of the first Beast ('the Beast,' adds the author, 'who hath the stroke of the sword, and lived.')<sup>2</sup> And it is given to him (the second beast) to put the breath of life into the image of the first Beast, so that the image speaks. And he has the power of causing all those who refuse to worship the first Beast to be put to death. And he establishes as a law that all, great and small, rich and poor, free and bond, are to bear a sign on their right hand or on their forehead. And yet again he makes it a law that no man may buy or sell, if he does not bear the mark of the Beast, either his name in full, or the number of his name, that is to say, the number which would result from the addition of the letters of his name treated as figures : 'Here is wisdom !' cries the author. 'He that hath understanding let him count the number of the Beast ; for it is the number of a man ; and his number is six hundred and sixty and six.'<sup>3</sup>

As a matter of fact, if we add together the letters of the name of Nero, transcribed in Hebrew, קסר נרון (Νέρων Καῖσαρ), according to their numerical value, the number 666 is obtained. *Neron Kesar* was indeed the name by which the Christians of Asia designated the monster ; the Asiatic currency bore as inscription : ΝΕΡΩΝ.ΚΑΙΣΑΡ. Calculations of this nature were familiar to the Jews, and formed a cabalistic recreation which they called *ghematria* ; the Asiatic Greeks were not foreign to it either, and, in the second century, the gnostics were passionately fond of it.

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xiii. 12.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xiii. 14.<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* xiii. 18.



Thus the Emperor represented by the head stricken with a mortal blow but not slain is, as the author himself informs us, Nero—Nero who, according to a popular belief widely spread in Asia, was still alive. About this there can be no doubt. But who is the second beast, the agent of Nero, who has the manner of a pious Jew and the language of Satan, who is Nero's *alter ego*, exerts himself on the latter's behalf, works miracles, going so far as to make a statue of Nero speak, persecutes the faithful Jews who object to render Nero the same honours as pagans or to bear the mark of affiliation to his party, renders life impossible for them, and forbids them the most necessary activities, selling and buying? Certain peculiarities would point to a Jewish official, such as Tiberius Alexander, devoted to the Romans and regarded by his fellow-countrymen as an apostate. The very act of paying taxes to the Empire might be termed 'worship of the Beast,' tribute, in the eyes of Jews, having the character of a religious offering and implying an attitude of worship towards the sovereign. The sign or mark of the Beast (Νέρων Καῖσαρ) which it is necessary to bear, in order to enjoy legal rights, might be either the Roman civic warrant, without which, in certain countries, life was difficult, and adopting which for Jewish enthusiasts constituted the crime of abetting a work of Satan; or the coinage bearing Nero's effigy, a coinage held by the Jewish rebels to be execrable, on account of its blasphemous images and inscriptions, to such an extent that they hastened as soon as they won their freedom at Jerusalem to substitute for it an orthodox currency. The partizan of the Romans in question, by maintaining only money of the Neronian type as valid in business transactions, might appear to have committed an enormity. Such money had to be accepted in payment and those who, from religious scruples, refused to touch it, were, so to speak, outlawed.

The proconsul of Asia at this moment was Fonteius Agrippa, a serious official, of whom it is out of the question for us to think as a means of escaping from our difficulty. An Asiatic high priest, zealous in the worship



of Rome and Augustus, and employing the civil power delegated to him for harassing the Jews and Christians, would respond to some of the requirements of the problem. But the features which represent the second beast as a seducer and thaumaturgist, do not accord with such an individual. These characteristics point to a false prophet, an enchanter, in particular to Simon the Magician, an imitator of Christ, who in legend had become the flatterer, the parasite and the wizard of Nero, or to Balbillus of Ephesus, or to the Antichrist of whom Paul speaks with some obscurity in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians. It is probable that the man whom the writer of the Apocalypse had in view was some impostor at Ephesus, a partizan of Nero, perhaps one of the false Nero's agents, or the false Nero himself. The same individual, indeed, is later called 'the False Prophet,' in the sense that he is the preacher of a false God, who is Nero. It is necessary to keep in view the importance enjoyed at this epoch by the Magi, the Chaldæans and the 'mathematicians,' pests whose headquarters was Ephesus. Let it be remembered, also, that Nero had for a moment dreamed of 'the kingdom of Jerusalem,' that he was deeply engrossed in the astrological movement of his time, and that, almost alone among the Emperors, he was worshipped in his own lifetime, which was one of the signs of the Antichrist. During his journey in Greece especially, the adulation lavished on him by Achaia and Asia surpassed all imagination. Finally, let us not forget the gravity, in Asia and the islands of the Archipelago, of the movement in favour of the false Nero. The fact that the second beast comes up from the earth, and not, like the first, from the sea, shows that the incident in question took place, not at Rome, but in Asia or Judæa. All this does not suffice to elucidate the obscurities of this vision which, in the author's mind, doubtless had the same material precision as the others; but which, owing to its allusion to a provincial event unrecorded by the historians, and only possessing importance in the seer's personal impressions, remains for us an enigma.

In the midst of the floods of wrath now appears a little isle of verdure. In the fiercest part of the frightful struggles of the latter days there is to be a place of refreshment—the Church, the little family of Jesus. The prophet beholds, reposing on Mount Zion, the hundred and forty-four thousand of the redeemed from every part of the earth, with the name of God written on their foreheads. The Lamb rests in peace in their midst. The divine harmonies of harps descend on the assembly; the musicians sing a new song which none other than the hundred and forty-four thousand of the chosen may repeat. Chastity is the sign of these blessed beings; all are virgins without soilure; never have their mouths uttered falsehood; and they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes, as the first-fruits of the earth and the nucleus of the world to come.

After this hasty glance at an asylum of peace and innocence, the author returns to his visions of terror. Three angels rapidly traverse heaven. The first flies to the zenith holding the eternal Gospel. He proclaims, in the face of all the nations, the new doctrine and announces the day of judgment. The second celebrates, in anticipation, the destruction of Rome: 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, which has made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.'<sup>1</sup> The third angel forbids the worship of the Beast and the image of the Beast made by the False Prophet:—

If any man worshippeth the beast and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead, or upon his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image, and whoso receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

To reassure the faithful on a doubt, which sometimes tormented them, as to the fate of brethren who were dying every day, a voice orders the prophet to write: 'Blessed

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xiv. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xiv. 9-12.

are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours ; for their works follow with them.<sup>1</sup>

Images of the great judgment jostle one another in the ardent imagination of the seer. A white cloud passes over heaven, and on this cloud is seated one with the likeness of a Son of Man (an angel resembling the Messiah), having on his head a crown of gold, and in his hand a sharp sickle. The harvest of the earth is ripe. The Son of Man casts forth his sickle and the earth is reaped. Another angel proceeds to the vintage ; he throws all into the great winepress of the wrath of God. The winepress is trodden outside the city, and the blood which flows from it mounts to the height of horses' bridles over an area of sixteen hundred furlongs.

After these different episodes, a divine ceremony, similar to the two mysteries of the opening of the seals and the trumpets, is unrolled before the seer. Seven angels are bidden to strike the earth with the seven last plagues, which bring the wrath of God to its consummation. But beforehand we are reassured as to the fate of the chosen ; by a vast sea of crystal mingled with fire are to be seen the conquerors of the Beast, that is to say, those who have refused to worship his image and the number of his name, holding in their hands the harps of God, and singing the song of Moses after the crossing of the Red Sea, and the song of the Lamb. The gate of the heavenly tabernacle opens and the seven angels are seen coming from it, clad in linen garments and bound about the breast with golden girdles. One of the four animals gives them seven cups filled to the brim with the wrath of God. Then the Temple is filled with the smoke of the Divine Majesty, and none may enter therein until the episode of the seven cups is at an end.

The first angel empties his cup upon the earth, and a grievous ulcer strikes all men who bear the mark of the Beast and worship his image.

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xiv. 13.

The second pours his cup into the sea, and the sea is changed into blood, and all the living creatures therein perish.

The third angel pours his cup on the rivers and sources, and they are turned into blood. The angel of the waters does not complain about the loss of his element; he says, 'Righteous art thou, which art and which wast, thou Holy One, because thou didst thus judge; for they poured out the blood of the saints and prophets, and blood hast thou given them to drink; they are worthy.'<sup>1</sup> The altar says for its part: 'Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgements.'<sup>2</sup>

The fourth angel pours out his cup upon the sun, and the sun burns men up like fire, but, far from being penitent, they blaspheme God who has the power of inflicting such plagues.

The fifth angel pours out his cup on the throne of the Beast (the city of Rome), and the whole kingdom of the Beast (the Roman Empire) is plunged in darkness. Men gnaw their tongues with pain; in place of repenting, they insult the God of heaven.

The sixth angel pours his cup into the Euphrates, which at once dries up, that the way may be made ready for the kings coming from the East. Then from the mouth of the Dragon (Satan), the mouth of the Beast (Nero) and the mouth of the False Prophet (?), come forth three unclean spirits like frogs. These are spirits of devils working miracles. The three spirits go to find the kings of the whole earth, and to gather them together for the battle of the great day of the Lord. ('Behold, I come as a thief,' cries the voice of Jesus in the midst of all this, 'Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame!')<sup>3</sup> They assemble in the place which is in Hebrew called Har-Magedon.

The general idea pervading all this symbolism is sufficiently clear. We have already noticed in the seer the opinion universally accepted throughout the province of Asia, that

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xv. 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xv. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* xvi. 15.

Nero, after having escaped from Phaon's villa, had taken refuge among the Parthians, and thence was to return to crush his foes. It was believed, not without apparent justification, that the Parthian princes, who had been friendly to Nero during his reign, still gave him their support; and it is a fact that the court of the Arsacides was, for more than twenty years, the refuge of false Nero's. All this appeared to the author of the Apocalypse to be an infernal scheme concocted between Satan, Nero, and that counsellor of Nero who has already figured under the form of the second beast. These creatures of perdition are engaged in forming a league in the East, the army of which will soon pass the Euphrates and conquer the Roman Empire. As to the special significance of the name Har-Magedon, it is for us inexplicable.

The seventh angel pours out his cup upon the air, and a cry comes from the altar, saying, 'It is done!' And there are lightnings and voices and thunders and an earthquake, the like of which has never been seen, which shatters the great city (Jerusalem) into three fragments; the cities of the nations fall, and Babylon the great (Rome) is remembered by God, who at last prepares to make her drink the cup of the wine of his wrath. Every island flees away and the mountains disappear; hailstones, a talent in weight, fall upon men, and men blaspheme because of this plague.

The cycle of preludes is completed; their remains but to behold the revelation of the judgment of God. In the first instance, the seer shows us the judgment of the greatest of all the guilty, the city of Rome. One of the seven angels who have poured out the cups approaches John, saying: 'Come hither, I will show thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters; with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication.'<sup>1</sup> Then John sees a woman sitting upon a beast like that which, arising from the sea, personified by his general form, the Roman Empire, and by one of his

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xvii. 1, 2.



heads, Nero. The beast is scarlet and covered with blasphemous names; he has seven heads and ten horns. The harlot wears the dress of her profession; clad in purple and covered with gold and pearls and precious stones, she holds in her hand a cup full of the abominations and impurities of her fornication. And on her forehead is written a name, a mystery: 'BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.'<sup>1</sup>

And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder. And the angel said unto me, 'Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come. Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth: and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goeth into perdition. And the ten horns that thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour. These have one mind, and they give their power and authority unto the beast. These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they also shall overcome that are with him, called and chosen and faithful.' And he saith unto me, 'The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire. For God did put in their hearts to do his mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished. And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.'<sup>2</sup>

This is quite clear. The harlot is Rome, which has corrupted the world, used her power to propagate and strengthen idolatry, persecuted the saints, and made the

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xvii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xvii. 6-18.



blood of martyrs flow in torrents. The Beast is Nero, who has been believed dead, who is to return, but whose second reign will be of short duration and followed by final ruin. The seven heads have a double significance: they are the seven hills on which Rome is built, but they are more especially the seven Emperors: Julius Cæsar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero and Galba. The first five are dead; for the moment Galba is on the throne, but he is old and feeble and will soon fall. The sixth, Nero, who is at once the Beast and one of the seven Emperors, is not really dead. He will reign again, though only for a short time, will thus be the eighth king, and will then perish. As for the ten horns they are the proconsuls and imperial legates of the ten principal provinces, who are not kings in the true sense, but receive their power from the Emperor for a limited period, govern in accord with a single source of ideas, that of Rome, and are entirely submissive to the Empire from which their power is derived. These partial kings are all as malevolent towards the Christians as Nero himself. As representatives of provincial interests, they will humiliate Rome, will take from her the power of administering the Empire, which up till then she will have enjoyed, will maltreat her, set her on fire, and share her spoils among them. However, God does not as yet desire the dismemberment of the Empire; he inspires the generals in command of the provincial armies and all the men who by turn hold the Empire's fate in their hands (Vindex, Verginius, Nymphidius, Sabinus, Galba, Macer, Capito, Otho, Vitellius, Mucianus and Vespasian) to unite in reconstructing the Empire, and instead of setting themselves up as independent sovereigns, which, to the Jewish author seemed the most natural line of action, to make homage of their kingship to the Beast.

One can see to what extent the tractate of the chief of the Asiatic Churches touched the quick of a situation which, to imaginations so easily impressed as those of the Jews, must have seemed strange. The fact was that Nero, by his wickedness and the folly peculiar to himself alone, had

thrown reason off its hinges. At his death the Empire seemed, as it were, without heirs. After Caligula's assassination there was still a republican party; and, moreover, the adoptive family of Augustus was in enjoyment of all its power; after Nero's assassination the republican party had almost ceased to exist, and the family of Augustus was at an end. The Empire found itself in the hands of eight or ten generals who exercised great authority. The author of the Apocalypse, in his ignorance of Roman politics, is astonished that these ten chiefs, who appear to him to be kings, have not declared themselves independent, but instead have formed an alliance; and he attributes this result to the action of the divine will. It is obvious that the Jews of the East, who had been hard pressed by the Romans for two years, but after July 68 found their yoke light owing to Mucianus and Vespasian being occupied with general affairs, believed that the Empire was on the point of dissolution and experienced a momentary triumph. This was not so superficial a view as one might be tempted to suppose. Tacitus, in entering on his narrative of the events of the year on the threshold of which the Apocalypse was written, calls it *annum reipublicæ prope supremum*. To the Jews it was matter for great astonishment when they saw the 'ten kings' return 'to the Beast' (the unity of the Empire) and place their kingships at his feet. They had hoped that the ruin of Rome would result from the independence of the 'ten kings'; opposed as they were to a great central state organisation, they thought that the proconsuls and legates hated Rome, and, arguing from their own feelings, supposed that these powerful chiefs would act like satraps or else like a Hyrcanus or a Jannæus, kings who exterminated their enemies. They at least relished, like malevolent provincials, the great humiliation which the queen city of the world underwent when the right of appointing sovereigns passed to the provinces, and when Rome received within her walls masters whom she had not first acclaimed.

What was the relation of the Apocalypse to the singular episode of the false Nero, which, just at the moment when

the seer of Patmos was writing, was arousing excitement throughout Asia and the islands of the Archipelago? Such a coincidence is assuredly of the most singular nature. Cythnos and Patmos are only about 120 miles from each other, and news circulates quickly in the Archipelago. The days during which the Christian prophet wrote his work were those when most was spoken of the impostor, by some saluted with enthusiasm, by others anticipated with horror. We have shown that he took up his quarters at Cythnos in January 69, or perhaps in December 68. The centurion Sisenna, who touched at Cythnos in the early days of February, on his way from the East bearing assurances of friendship from the army of Syria to the Prætorians of Rome, had much difficulty in escaping him. A very few days later, Calpurnius Asprenas, who had received from Galba the government of Galatia and Pamphylia, and was accompanied by two galleys of the Misenum fleet, arrived at Cythnos. Emissaries of the pretender tried the magic effect of Nero's name on the commanders of the ships; the impostor, affecting an air of sadness, made appeal to the fidelity of those who once had been 'his soldiers.' He prayed them to land him at least in Syria or Egypt, countries on which he founded his hopes. The commanders, either as a ruse or because they were really impressed, asked for time. When Asprenas had learnt everything, he surprised and seized the impostor and had him put to death. His body was carried about Asia and then taken to Rome, so as to refute those of his partizans who might have wished to raise doubts concerning his death. May there be an illusion to this unhappy wretch in the words: 'The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go into perdition . . . the other [king] is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while'?<sup>1</sup> It is possible. The monster, rising from the abyss, would form a vivid image of the short-lived power which the wise writer saw emerging from the sea on the horizon at Patmos. We

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xvii. 8, 10.

cannot speak on the matter with certainty, for the belief that Nero was among the Parthians suffices to explain everything ; but this belief did not prevent faith in the false Nero of Cythnos, since it might be supposed that the latter's appearance was indeed the return of the monster, and coincided with the passage of the Euphrates by his Eastern allies. In any case it seems to us impossible that these lines could have been written after the murder of the false Nero by Asprenas. The sight of the impostor's corpse taken from town to town, contemplation of his features extinguished by death, must have formed too overwhelming evidence against the fears for the Beast's return with which the author is possessed. We willingly admit, therefore, that John, in the isle of Patmos, was acquainted with the events in progress on the isle of Cythnos, and that the effect produced on him by these strange rumours was the primary cause of the letter which he wrote to the Churches of Asia, to inform them of the great news of Nero having come to life again.

Interpreting the political events in conformity with his hatred, the author, like a Jewish fanatic, has predicted that the governors of the provinces, whom he believed full of rancour against Rome, and, to a certain extent, in alliance with Nero, will ravage the city and give it to the flames. Now taking the deed as accomplished, he sings the ruin of his foe. In this he has only to imitate the ancient prophets' declamations against Babylon and Tyre. Israel has marked out history with curses ; to all the great profane states she has said : 'Happy he that shall render thee the evil which thou hast done us !' A glorious angel descends from heaven and cries with a mighty voice : 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and is become an habitation of devils, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird. For by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen ; and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth waxed rich by the power of her wantonness.'<sup>1</sup> Another voice is heard from heaven :

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xviii. 2, 3.

Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not her plagues : for her sins have reached even unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Render unto her even as she rendered, and double unto her the double according to her works : in the cup which she mingled, mingle unto her double. How much soever she glorified herself, and waxed wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning : for she saith in her heart, ' I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning.' Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death, and mourning, and famine ; and she shall be utterly burned with fire ; for strong is the Lord God which judged her. And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, ' Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city ! for in one hour is thy judgement come.' And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no man buyeth their merchandise any more ; merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet ; and all thyne wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel made of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble ; and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep ; and merchandise of horses and chariots and slaves ; and souls of men. . . . The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning ; saying, ' Woe, woe, the great city, she that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl ! for in one hour so great riches is made desolate.' And every shipmaster, and every one that saileth any whither, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood afar off, and cried out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, saying, ' What city is like the great city ?' And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, ' Woe, woe, the great city, wherein were made rich all that had their ships in the sea by reason of her costliness ! for in one hour is she made desolate.

' Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye saints, and ye apostles, and ye prophets ; for God hath judged your judgement on her.'<sup>1</sup>

Then an angel of extraordinary might seizes a stone as large as a millstone and casts it into the sea, saying :

Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee ; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft, shall be found any more at all in thee ; and the voice of a millstone shall be heard no more at all

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation xviii. 4-13, 15-20.



in thee ; and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee ; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee : for thy merchants were the princes of the earth ; for with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth.<sup>1</sup>

The ruin of this, the greatest enemy of the people of God, is celebrated in heaven with great rejoicing. A voice like that of an innumerable multitude is heard crying : ' Salvation, and glory, and power, belong to our God : for true and righteous are his judgements ; for he hath judged the great harlot, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and he hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.'<sup>2</sup> And another body of voices responds : ' Hallelujah ! And her smoke goeth up for ever and ever.'<sup>3</sup> Then the twenty-four elders and the four monsters fall down and worship God, seated on the throne, saying : ' Amen, Hallelujah !'<sup>4</sup> A voice comes from the throne, singing the inaugural psalm of the new kingdom : ' Give praise to our God, all ye his servants, ye that fear him, the small and the great.'<sup>5</sup> And a voice like that of a multitude, or that of many waters, or the sound of mighty thunders, replies : ' Hallelujah ! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure.'<sup>6</sup> The fine linen, the author adds, represents the righteous acts of the saints.

Freed, in fact, from the presence of the great harlot (Rome), the earth is ripe for the celestial marriage and the reign of the Messiah. The angel says to the seer : ' Write : Blessed are they which are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'<sup>7</sup> Then heaven opens, and Christ, here called for the first time by his mystic name, ' the Word of God,' appears as a conqueror, mounted on a white horse. He comes to tread the winepress of the wrath of God, to

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xviii. 21-24.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xix. 1, 2.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* xix. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* xix. 4.    <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* xix. 5.    <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* xix. 6-8.    <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* xix. 9.



inaugurate his reign with a rod of iron over the pagans. His eyes are as a flame of fire, his garments are sprinkled with blood, and on his head are several crowns with an inscription in mysterious characters. From his mouth proceeds a sharp sword wherewith to smite the Gentiles; on his thigh is written his title: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.<sup>1</sup> The whole army of heaven follows him, mounted on white horses, and clad in fine linen. A peaceful triumph is awaited, but the time is not yet come. Although Rome is destroyed, the Roman world, represented by Nero the Antichrist, is not annihilated. An angel, standing erect on the sun, cries with a loud voice to all the birds flying in mid-heaven:

Come and be gathered together unto the great supper of God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great.<sup>2</sup>

Then the prophet sees the Beast (Nero) and the kings of the earth (the almost independent rulers of the provinces) with their armies assembled to make war on him who sits on the white horse. The Beast (Nero) is seized and with him the False Prophet who worked miracles before him, and both are thrown alive into the sulphurous lake which burns eternally. Their armies are exterminated by the sword which proceeds from the mouth of him who is seated on the horse, and the birds are gorged with the flesh of the dead.

The Roman armies, the great instrument of Satan's power, are vanquished; Nero the Antichrist, their last chief, is imprisoned in hell; but the Dragon, the old serpent, Satan, is still alive. We have seen how he was cast from heaven upon the earth; the earth must now be delivered from him in its turn. An angel descends from heaven holding the key of the abyss, and having in his hand a great chain. He seizes the Dragon, binds him for a thousand years, throws him into the abyss, shuts with his key the opening of the gulf, and seals it with a seal. For a

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xix. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xix. 17, 18.

thousand years the devil is to remain in chains. The moral and physical evils of which he is the cause are to be suspended, not destroyed. Satan can no longer seduce the nations, but he is not annihilated for eternity.

A tribunal is appointed to declare those who are to share in the reign of a thousand years. This reign is reserved for the martyrs. The first place belongs to those who have been beheaded for giving testimony for Jesus and the word of God (the Roman martyrs of 64); then come those who have refused to worship the Beast and his image, and have not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands (the faithful of Ephesus, of whom the seer was one). The elect of this first kingdom rise from the dead and reign over the earth with Christ for a thousand years. This does not mean that the rest of mankind have disappeared, or even that the whole world has become Christian; the *millenium* is, as it were, a little paradise in the centre of the earth. Rome exists no more; Jerusalem has taken her place as capital of the world. There the faithful form a kingdom of priests, and serve God and Christ. There is no longer any great profane empire or civil power hostile to the Church; the nations come to Jerusalem to give homage to the Messiah who rules them by terror. During these thousand years, the dead who have not taken part in the first resurrection do not live; they wait. Those who participate in the first kingdom, therefore, are privileged. Besides an infinite eternity, they shall have their millenium on earth with Jesus; they shall know no death.

When the thousand years shall be accomplished, Satan is to be delivered from his prison for some time. Evil will begin once more on the earth. Satan, unbound from his chains, will anew misguide the nations, will urge them at all the ends of the earth into terrible wars. Gog and Magog (mythical personifications of the barbarian invasions) will lead to battle armies more numerous than the sands of the sea. The Church will be, as it were, engulfed in this deluge. The barbarians will lay siege to the camp of the

saints, the beloved city, that is to say, Jerusalem, still an earthly city but one wholly sacred, in which are the faithful friends of Jesus. Fire from heaven will fall upon the barbarians and consume them. Then Satan, who has seduced them, shall be cast into the lake of burning brimstone, where the Beast (Nero) and the False Prophet (?) are already lying, and where all these lost creatures are henceforth to be tormented, day and night, for ever and ever.

Creation has now accomplished its task; there remains but to proceed to the last judgment. A throne transfused with light appears, and on it is seated the supreme judge. At sight of him earth and heaven flee away; henceforth there is no place for them. The dead, great and small, arise from their graves. Death and *Sheol* render up their prey, while the sea gives up those drowned folk who have been devoured by it and have therefore not regularly descended into *Sheol*. All appear together before the throne. Great books are brought, in which rigorous account is taken of each man's deeds; and another book is also opened, the 'book of life,' in which are written the names of the predestined. Then all are judged according to their works. Those whose names are not found written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire, into which Death and *Sheol* are also thrown.

Evil being destroyed without possibility of return, the reign of absolute righteousness is about to begin. The old earth and the old heaven have passed away; a new earth and a new heaven succeed them; there is no more sea. This new earth and heaven are, however, only the former earth and heaven made new; and just as Jerusalem was the pearl, the jewel of the old earth, so Jerusalem will still be the radiant centre of the new. The apostle beholds this new Jerusalem descending from heaven, from the side of God, arrayed as a bride adorned for her husband. A great voice comes from the throne:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes;

and death shall be no more ; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more : the first things are passed away.<sup>1</sup>

Jehovah himself speaks to promulgate the law of this eternal world :

Behold, I make all things new. . . . They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things ; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.<sup>2</sup>

An angel then approaches the seer, saying to him : 'Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb,'<sup>3</sup> and carries him away in the spirit to a high mountain, whence he displays to him in detail the ideal Jerusalem transfused and clad with the glory of God. Her light is like that of a crystalline jasper ; her form a perfect square, each side being three thousand furlongs in length, set to the four winds of heaven ; she is surrounded by a wall one hundred and forty-four cubits in height, pierced by twelve gates. Over each gate watches an angel, and above, is written the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The base of the wall has twelve foundations of stone, and on each of these foundations shines the name of one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Each of these superposed layers is adorned with precious stones, the first of jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The wall itself is of jasper ; the city is of pure gold transparent as glass ; each of the gates is wrought of a single great pearl. There is no temple in the city, for God himself and the Lamb serve as its temple. The throne which the prophet saw, at the beginning of his revelation, in heaven is now in the midst of the city, that is to say, in the centre of a regenerated and harmoniously

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xxi. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xxi. 5-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* xxi. 9.

organised humanity. On this throne God and the Lamb are seated. From the foot of the throne emerges the river of life, shining and transparent as crystal, which flows through the great street of the city. On its banks grows the tree of life, which bears twelve manner of fruits, one variety each month. These fruits seem to be reserved for the Israelites; the leaves have medicinal virtues for the healing of the Gentiles. The city has need neither of sun nor moon to give light; for the glory of God illumines her, and the lamp that throws forth the light is the Lamb. The nations will walk in her light; the kings of the earth will do her homage with their glory, and her gates will be shut neither by day nor by night, so great will be the multitude of those who come bearing her tribute. Nothing impure, nothing unclean may enter, only those whose names are inscribed in the book of life shall find a place therein. There shall no longer exist either religious division or anathema; the whole world will join in the pure worship of God and the Lamb. At every hour his servants shall see his face, and his name shall be written on their foreheads. This reign of righteousness will endure for ever and ever.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE FORTUNES OF THE BOOK

THE work concludes with this epilogue :

And I John am he that heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. And he saith unto me, 'See thou do it not : I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them which keep the words of this book : worship God.' And he saith unto me, 'Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book ; for the time is at hand. He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still : and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still : and he that is holy, let him be made holy still.'<sup>1</sup>

A distant voice, the voice of Jesus himself, is represented as responding to these promises and confirming them.

Behold, I come quickly ; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star.<sup>2</sup>

Then the voices of heaven and those of earth intercross and arrive *moriendo* at a finale in perfect harmony.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come : he that will, let him take the water of life freely.

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xxii. 8-11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xxii. 12-16.



*I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book : and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.*

He which testifieth these things saith, 'Yea : I come quickly.' Amen : come, Lord Jesus.

THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS BE WITH THE SAINTS. AMEN.<sup>1</sup>

There can be no doubt that, presented as it was under cover of the most venerated name in Christendom, the Apocalypse made a very deep impression on the Churches of Asia. A crowd of details, now become obscure, were clear to contemporaries. There was nothing surprising in these bold announcements of a convulsion close at hand. Not less explicit utterances attributed to Jesus were daily being spread abroad and winning acceptance. For a year, indeed, the events which took place in the world might well seem a marvellous confirmation of the book. About February 1st, news reached Asia of the death of Galba and the succession to power of Otho. Then each day brought some apparent indication of the decay of the Empire : the powerlessness of Otho to compel recognition in all the provinces, Vitellius maintaining his title in the teeth of Rome and the Senate, the two gory conflicts of Bedriacum, Otho in his turn abandoned, the advent of Vespasian, the battle in the streets of Rome, the conflagration of the Capitol lighted by the combatants, a conflagration from which many concluded that Rome's destinies were drawing to a close,—all these things must have seemed in marvellous conformity with the prophet's gloomy predictions. Disillusionments only began with the capture of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the definite consolidation of the Flavian dynasty. But religious faith is never rebuffed in its hopes ; and, besides, the work was obscure, and in many places susceptible of diverse interpretations. Thus a few years after the book's appearance, a sense differing from that which the author intended was sought in several

<sup>1</sup> Revelation xxii. 17-21.

chapters. The author had announced that the Roman Empire would not be reconstructed, and that the Temple of Jerusalem would not be destroyed. From these two statements it was necessary to find loop-holes of escape. As to the reappearance of Nero, belief in that was not so soon renounced; even under Trajan, people of the lower class persisted in thinking that he would return. The idea of the Beast's number was long retained; there was even a variation in it, which spread in the countries of the West, making the number accord with the Latin usages. There are certain examples in which 616 takes the place of 666, for 616 responds to the Latin form *Nero Cæsar* (the Hebrew letter *nun* being equivalent to 50).

During the first three centuries the general sense of the book was preserved, at least for some initiated persons. The author of the Sibylline poem which dates from about the year 80, if he has not read the prophecy of Patmos, has at least heard it discussed. He lives in an entirely analogous order of ideas. He knows the signification of the sixth cup. For him, Nero is the anti-Messiah; the monster has fled beyond the Euphrates, whence he is to return with thousands of men. The author of the Apocalypse of Esdras (a work which certainly dates either from 96, 97, or 98) notoriously imitates John's Apocalypse, employing his symbolical processes, his methods of notation, and his vocabulary. As much may be said of the 'Ascension of Isaiah' (a work of the second century), in which Nero, as the incarnation of Belial, plays a part which proves that the author knew the number of the Beast. The authors of the Sibylline poems which date from the times of the Antonines, equally enter into the enigmas of the apostolic manifesto, and adopt its utopias, even those which, like the return of Nero, had decidedly suffered from the lapse of years. St Justin and Melito appear to have almost completely understood the book. As much can be said of Commodianus, who (about 250) mingles with his interpretation elements from other sources, but does not doubt for an instant that Nero, the Antichrist, must needs rise

from hell to engage in a supreme struggle against Christianity, and conceives of the destruction of Rome-Babylon in exactly the same way that it had been imagined two hundred years previously. Finally, Victorinus of Petau (who died in 303) still continues to comment with sufficient justice on the Apocalypse. He is quite aware of the fact that the resuscitated Nero is the true Antichrist. As to the number of the Beast, it was probably lost before the end of the second century. Irenæus (about 190) is in gross error on this point, as well as on several others of major importance, and inaugurates the series of chimerical commentaries and arbitrary systems of symbolism. Some peculiarly subtle points, such as the significance of the False Prophet and of *Har-Magedon*, were lost at a very early date.

After the reconciliation of the Empire and the Church in the fourth century, the fortunes of the Apocalypse were gravely compromised. The Greek and Latin doctors, who no longer separated the future of Christianity from that of the Empire, could not admit the inspiration of a seditious book, the fundamental feature of which was hatred of Rome and prophecy of the end of her dominion. Nearly all the enlightened portion of the Western Church, that which had received a Greek education and held in aversion writings of a millenarian and Judeo-Christian tendency, declared the Apocalypse to be an apocryphal work. The book had acquired so strong a position in the Greek and Latin New Testament that it was impossible to expel it; so, in order to escape the awkward theories which it raised, recourse to ingenious feats of exegesis was necessary. The evidence, however, was overwhelming. The Latins, less opposed than the Greeks to millenarianism, continued to identify the Antichrist with Nero. Up to the time of Charlemagne, there was a kind of tradition to this effect. St Beatus of Liebana, who wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse in 786, affirms, although with the addition, it is true, of more than one inconsistent theory, that the Beast of chapters xiii. and xvii., who is to reappear at the

head of ten kings to annihilate the city of Rome, is Nero the Antichrist. For a moment, even, he is within an ace of the principle which, in the nineteenth century, was to lead critics to a true computation of the Emperors, and to the determination of the date of the book.

It is only towards the twelfth century, when the Middle Ages take to the path of scholastic rationalism, which has but little heed of the tradition of the Fathers, that the meaning of John's vision is quite misapprehended. Joachim of Flora may be considered as the first who boldly threw the Apocalypse into the field of boundless imagination, and sought, under the grotesque images of a circumstantially inspired work, which itself limits its horizon to three years and a half, the secret of the entire future of humanity.

The fanciful commentaries to which this false conception has given rise have cast undeserved discredit on the book. The Apocalypse has, in our time, thanks to a saner exegesis, regained the lofty place to which it is entitled among the sacred Scriptures. In a sense the Apocalypse is the seal of prophecy, Israel's last word. Let us read in the ancient prophets—in Joel, for example—the description of the 'day of Jehovah,' that is to say, the great assize which the supreme judge of human things holds from time to time to restore the harmonious order which men are constantly disturbing, and we shall find therein the germ of the vision of Patmos. Every révolution, every historical convulsion, to the imagination of the Jew, obstinate in dispensing with the immortality of the soul and in establishing the reign of justice on this earth, became a stroke of Providence, the prelude of a still more solemn and final judgment. With each event a prophet arose to cry, 'Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, . . . for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.'<sup>1</sup> The Apocalypse is the sequel and crown of this strange literature, which is the peculiar glory of Israel. Its author is the last of the great prophets; he is only inferior to his predecessors in that he imitates them; his is the same soul, the same spirit. The Apocalypse offers the

<sup>1</sup> Joel ii. 1.

almost unique phenomenon of a *pastiche* of genius, an original cento. With the exception of two or three inventions peculiar to the author and of marvellous beauty, the poem, as a whole, is composed of features borrowed from previous prophetic and apocalyptic literature, more especially from Ezekiel, the author of the Book of Daniel, and the two Isaiahs. The Christian seer is in truth the pupil of these great men; he knows their writings by heart; he draws from them their final conclusions. Lacking his serenity and harmony, he is the brother of that marvellous poet of the age of the Captivity, that second Isaiah whose luminous soul seems as it were impregnate, six centuries in advance, with all the dews and all the perfumes of the future.

Like the majority of peoples which possess a brilliant literary past, Israel lived on images consecrated by her ancient and admirable literature. It was scarcely customary any longer to write without employing fragments of ancient texts. Christian poetry, in particular, was unacquainted with any other literary method. But when passion is sincere, even the most artificial form acquires beauty. The *Words of a Believer*<sup>1</sup> stands in the same relation to the Apocalypse as the Apocalypse to the ancient prophets; and yet the *Words of a Believer* is a truly impressive work, which at every new reading excites powerful emotion.

The dogmas of the age were, like the style, somewhat artificial, but they responded to the needs of profound feeling. The method of theological elaboration consisted in a bold system of transposition, the application to the reign of the Messiah and to Jesus of every phrase of the ancient writings which seemed susceptible of being brought into vague relation with a hazy ideal. As the exegesis which ruled these Messianic combinations was of an entirely mediocre quality, the singular results of which we speak often imply grave misinterpretations. This is particularly noticeable in the passages in the Apocalypse referring to

<sup>1</sup> *Les Paroles d'un Croyant*, by the Abbé de Lamennais, published 1834.



Gog and Magog, if they are compared with the corresponding chapters in Ezekiel. According to the latter, Gog, king of Magog, is to come 'in the course of time,'<sup>1</sup> when the people of Israel have returned from the captivity and settled down in Palestine, to make on them a war of extermination. About the time of the Greek translators of the Bible and of the composition of the Book of Daniel, the expression which simply signifies in classical Hebrew an indeterminate future, meant 'at the end of time,' and was no longer applicable except to the epoch of the Messiah. In this manner the author of the Apocalypse is led to connect chapters xxxviii. and xxxix. of Ezekiel with Messianic times, and to consider Gog and Magog as representatives of the barbarian and pagan world, which is to survive the ruin of Rome and co-exist with the millenarian reign of Christ and his saints.

This external method of creation, if I may so describe it, this manner of combining, by an appropriative exegesis, phrases taken here and there, and of constructing a new theology on these arbitrary lines, is also to be found in the Apocalypse in all that concerns the mystery of the end of time. The Apocalyptic theory in this matter differs in essential features from that which we find in St Paul, and from that which the Synoptic Gospels attribute to Jesus. St Paul seems, it is true, to believe at times in a reign of Christ in the time which is to elapse before the definite conclusion of all things, but he never reaches the same degree of precision as our author. According to the Apocalypse, indeed, the advent of Christ's future reign is nearly at hand; it must follow closely upon the destruction of the Roman Empire. The martyrs alone will rise again at this first resurrection; the rest of the dead will still remain in their graves. Such strange fancies were the consequence of the tardy and incoherent fashion in which the ideas of Israel on the other life were formed. It may be asserted that the Jews have only been led to the dogma

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xxxviii. 8. The reading in the Revised Version is 'in the latter years.'—*Trans. note.*



of immortality by the necessity of such a dogma for the justification of martyrdom. In the second Book of Maccabees, the seven young martyrs and their mother are strong in the hope that they will rise from the dead, while Antiochus will not. It is with regard to these legendary heroes that the first clearly-defined affirmations of an eternal life are to be found in Jewish literature, more especially the beautiful formula: 'Those that die for God live in the sight of God.' One can even detect the indication of a certain tendency to create for them a special fate beyond the grave, and to range them near God's throne 'from the present time' without awaiting resurrection. Tacitus, for his part, observes that the Jews attribute immortality only to the souls of those who have died in battle or in suffering punishment.

The reign of Christ and his martyrs is to take place on the earth, no doubt at Jerusalem, in the midst of the surrounding nations, which will be unconverted but respectful towards the saints. It is only to last a thousand years. After this term of a thousand years there is to be a new Satanic reign, during which the barbarian nations which the Church has not converted will make horrible warfare on one another and will be within an ace of destroying the Church itself. God will exterminate them, and then will come the 'second resurrection,' which will be general, and the final judgment, which will be followed by the end of the universe. This is the doctrine which has been called 'millenarianism,' a doctrine widely diffused in the first three centuries, which has never succeeded in becoming dominant in the Church, but has constantly reappeared at different epochs in her history, with the support of much more ancient and explicit texts than many other dogmas universally accepted. It is the result of a materialistic exegesis, dominated by the necessity of establishing the truth both of the phrases in which the kingdom of God is represented as destined to endure 'for ever and ever,' and those in which, to express the indefinite length of the Messianic reign, it is asserted that it will last for 'a

thousand years.' The rule of the interpreters called 'harmonists' was to clumsily place, end to end, elements which could not well be made to coincide. They were guided in the choice of the number 1000 by combining passages in the Psalms, which suggest that a day with God is worth a thousand years. Among the Jews also is to be found the idea that the Messiah's reign is not to be the blessed eternity, but an era of felicity during the centuries which will precede the end of the world. Several rabbis calculate, like the author of the Apocalypse, the duration of this reign at a thousand years. The author of the epistle attributed to Barnabas asserts that, just as creation lasted six days, so the destinies of the world will be accomplished in six thousand years (a day for God being equivalent to a thousand years), and that then, just as God rested on the seventh day, so also 'when his son shall come and put an end to the time of iniquity, and shall judge the wicked, and shall change the sun and the moon and all the stars, he shall rest again on the seventh day.' Which is equivalent to saying that he will reign for a thousand years, the reign of the Messiah being always compared to the Sabbath, which by its repose terminates the successive upheavals of a development of the universe. The idea of the eternity of individual life is so little familiar to the Jews, that the era of future rewards is, according to them, comprised in a term of years, considerable no doubt, but still finite.

The Persian aspect of these dreams is at once apparent. Millenarianism, and, if one may so phrase it, apocalypticism have flourished in Iran from a very early epoch. At the bottom of Zoroastrian ideas is a tendency to number the ages of the world, to count the periods of universal life by *hazars*, that is to say, by thousands of years, to imagine a reign of salvation which is to be the final crown for the trials of mankind. These ideas, in combination with the affirmations concerning the future which fill the ancient Hebrew prophets, became the soul of Jewish theology in the centuries preceding the present era. The apocalypses

especially were transfused with them; the revelations attributed to Daniel, Enoch, and Moses are almost Persian books in their tone, their doctrine, and their images. Does this imply that the authors of these strange works had read the Zend Scriptures as then existent? By no means. Such borrowings were indirect; they resulted from the fact that the Jewish imagination had been tinged with the colours of Iran. The same was the case for John's Apocalypse. The author of this Apocalypse had not, more than any other Christian, direct relations with Persia; the exotic elements which he introduced into his book were already incorporated in the traditional *midraschim*; our seer took them from the atmosphere in which he lived. The fact is that, from Hoshedar and Hoshedar-mah, the two prophets who are to precede Sosiosch, to the plagues which are to smite the world on the eve of the great days, and to the wars of the kings amongst themselves, which are to be the symptoms of the supreme struggle, all the elements of the Apocalyptic drama are to be found in the Parsi theory of the end of the world. The seven heavens, the seven angels, the seven spirits of God, which are constantly recurring in the vision of Patmos, also transport us into the very midst of Parsiism and even beyond. The hieratic and apotelesmatical meaning of the number seven seems, in fact, to have its origin in the Babylonian doctrine of the seven planets ruling the destiny of men and empires. Still more striking parallels are to be noticed in the mystery of the seven seals. Just as each of the seven tables of destiny was, in Assyrian mythology, dedicated to one of the planets, so the seven seals are in singular relationship to the seven planets, to the days of the week, and to the colours which Babylonian science connected with the planets. Thus the white horse apparently corresponds to the moon, the red horse to Mars, the black horse to Mercury, and the yellow horse to Jupiter.

The faults of such a form of composition are obvious, and it would be vain to attempt to dissimulate them. Hard and glaring colours, complete absence of all plastic

feeling, harmony sacrificed to symbolism, a certain crudity, aridity and lack of organic completeness, make the Apocalypse the absolute antipodes of the Greek masterpiece, the type of which is the living, bodily beauty of man or woman. A kind of materialism weighs down the author's most idealistic conceptions. He heaps up gold; like Orientals generally, he has an inordinate taste for precious stones. His heavenly Jerusalem is clumsy, puerile, impossible, in contradiction with all good architectural principles, which are those of reason. He makes it shining to the eyes, but he does not dream of having it adorned by the chisel of a Phidias. Similarly, God is for him a jewel-like vision, a kind of great diamond, burning with a thousand fires on a throne. Certainly the Olympian Jupiter is a far worthier symbol than this. The error which, at times, has given Christian art too great an inclination for rich decoration, finds its root in the Apocalypse. A Jesuit sanctuary in gold and lapis lazuli is necessarily more beautiful than the Parthenon, once the idea is admitted that the liturgical use of precious materials honours God.

A more mischievous feature is that gloomy hatred of the profane world which is common to our author and to all the makers of apocalypses, more especially to the author of the Book of Enoch. His harshness, his passionate and unjust judgments on Roman society, shock us, and, up to a certain point, justify those who summed up the new doctrine as being *odium humani generis*. The poor and virtuous man is always a little inclined to regard the world which he does not know as being more wicked than it is in reality. The crimes of wealthy men and courtiers appear to him in a singularly magnified form. This species of virtuous fury which certain barbarians, such as the Vandals, were, four centuries later, to feel towards civilization, was possessed in the highest degree by the Jews of the prophetic and apocalyptic school. In them may be detected a trace of the ancient spirit of the nomads whose ideal was patriarchal life, a great aversion from large towns which they regarded as hotbeds of corruption, a burning

jealousy of powerful states, founded on a military principle of which they were either incapable or distrustful.

It was all this which made the Apocalypse in many respects a dangerous book. It is essentially the book of Jewish pride. According to its author, the distinction between Jews and pagans is to endure even in the kingdom of God. While the twelve tribes eat the fruits of the tree of life, the Gentiles are to content themselves with a medicinal decoction of its leaves. The author regards the Gentiles, even those who believe in Jesus, even those who have been martyrs for Jesus, as children of adoption, outsiders introduced into the family of Israel, plebeians graciously permitted to approach an aristocracy. His Messiah is essentially the Jewish Messiah; for him Jesus is, before all else, the son of David, a product of the Church of Israel, a member of the holy family whom God has made his elect. It is the Church of Israel which carries out the work of salvation through this chosen one who has come from its midst. Every custom capable of establishing a bond of union between the pure race and the pagans (eating ordinary meats, practising marriage under ordinary conditions) seems to him an abomination. Pagans, as a whole, are in his eyes miscreants, defiled with all crimes, and only to be governed by terror. The actual world is the kingdom of devils. The disciples of Paul are the disciples of Balaam and Jezebel. Paul himself has no place among 'the twelve apostles of the Lamb,' who form the sole foundation of the Church of God; and the Church of Ephesus, Paul's creation, is praised 'that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them which call themselves apostles and they are not, and didst find them false.'<sup>1</sup>

All this is very far from the Gospel of Jesus. The author is too impassioned; he sees everything as it were through the veil of a blood-red apoplexy, or by the light of a conflagration. The most melancholy sight at Paris on May 25th, 1871, was not the flames; it was the general colour of the city when viewed from a lofty point, an

<sup>1</sup> Revelation ii. 2.



unnatural yellow tint, a kind of dull pallor. Such is the light with which our author colours his vision. Nothing can less resemble the clear sunshine of Galilee. Henceforth, one feels, the apocalyptic style was not, any more than the epistolary style, to be the literary form destined to convert the world. It was those little collections of sayings and parables, disdained by the exact traditionists, those *memorabilia* in which the less instructed and less well taught included, for their personal use, what they knew of the acts and words of Jesus, which were to be the reading and the charm of the future. The simple outline of the anecdotal life of Jesus was infinitely better calculated to enchant the world than the painful heaping-up of symbols in the apocalypses, and the touching exhortations of the apostolic letters. So true is it that in the mysterious travail of Christian growth it was Jesus, Jesus alone, who took the great, the triumphant, the decisive part. Each book, each Christian institution, is valuable in proportion to what it contains of Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels, in which Jesus is everything and of which, in a sense, he is the true author, will be, before and above all others, the book of Christianity, the book of eternity.

The Apocalypse, however, occupies in the sacred canon a place which from many points of view is legitimate. A book of threatenings and terror, the Apocalypse gave embodiment to the gloomy antithesis which the Christian consciousness, under the influence of a profound æsthetic principle, was moved to oppose to Jesus. If the Gospel is the book of Jesus, the Apocalypse is the book of Nero. Thanks to the Apocalypse, Nero has, for Christianity, the importance of a second founder. His hateful countenance became inseparable from that of Jesus. Waxing greater from century to century, the monster to whom the nightmare of the year 64 gave birth grew to be the terror of the Christian consciousness, the sombre giant of the evening of the world. A folio of 550 pages was compiled on his birth and education ; his vices, wealth, jewels, perfumes, and women ; his doctrine, miracles and entertainments.



The Antichrist has ceased to alarm us, and the work by Malavenda, to which we have just referred, has no longer many readers. We know that the end of the world is not so near as the inspired seers of the first century believed, and that this end will not be a sudden catastrophe. It will operate through cold in thousands of centuries, when our system has no longer the power of sufficiently repairing its losses, and when the planet Earth has exhausted the resources stored in the depths of the ancient sun to provide for its course. Before this exhaustion of planetary capital, will humanity have attained to perfect science, which is nothing else than mastery of the world's forces, or is the Earth, an unsuccessful experiment among so many millions of others, to freeze to ice before the problem of slaying death has been solved? We cannot tell. But, with the seer of Patmos, beyond the flux of changing alternatives, we perceive the ideal, and we affirm that one day the ideal will be realised. Through the mists of a universe in embryo, we behold the laws of life's progress, the consciousness of being steadily growing wider in scope, and the possibility of a state in which all will be merged in a final being (God), just as the innumerable buds and shoots of the tree are in the tree, just as the living organism's myriad cells are in the living organism—of a state, I say, in which universal life shall have reached consummation, in which all the individual beings who have existed shall live again in the life of God, shall see in him, shall rejoice in him, in him shall sing their eternal Hallelujah! Whatever the form under which each one of us conceives this future advent of the absolute, the Apocalypse cannot fail to give us pleasure. It symbolically expresses the fundamental principle that God is, but that, above all, he *shall* be. Its treatment is clumsy, its outlines meanly conceived; in it we seem to see the awkward pencil of a child drawing, with a tool which he cannot properly handle, the designs of a city which he has not seen. His naïve picture of the city of God, a great plaything of gold and pearls, does not the less remain an element in our dreams. Doubtless Paul

expresses the matter better when he sums up the final goal of the universe in these words, 'that God may be all in all.'<sup>1</sup> But for a long time still men will need a God who dwells with them, sympathises with their trials, is heedful of their struggles, 'wipes away every tear from their eyes.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I Corinthians xv. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation xxi. 4.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE ADVENT OF THE FLAVIANS

THE aspect of the world, as we have already pointed out, only too well corresponded to the dreams of the seer of Patmos. The system of military strokes of policy was bearing its fruits. Political power had passed into the hands of the soldiery, and the Empire was at auction. In the house of Nero there were assemblages, at which could be seen, at one and the same time, seven future Emperors and the father of an eighth. Verginius, the true republican, who desired the Empire for the Senate and the people, was only a utopian. Galba, an honest old general who refused to lend himself to this military orgy, was quickly lost. At one moment the soldiers had the idea of slaying all the senators in order to facilitate government. Roman unity seemed on the point of breaking. It was not only among the Christians that a situation so tragic inspired sinister predictions. There was talk of a child with three heads born at Syracuse, in whom was seen a symbol of the three Emperors who rose to power in less than one year, and were even all three reigning simultaneously for several hours.

Some days after the prophet of Asia had finished writing his strange work, Galba was put to death and Otho proclaimed in his stead (January 15th, 69). It seemed like a resurrection of Nero. A serious, economical man with little desire to please, Galba was in every way the antithesis of him whom he had displaced. Had he succeeded in making

his adoption of Piso prevail, he would have been a kind of Nerva, and the series of philosopher Emperors might have begun thirty years earlier ; but the detestable school of Nero won the day. Otho resembled that monster ; the soldiers and all those who had loved Nero found their idol again in him. He had been seen at the late Emperor's side, playing the part of chief among his favourites, rivalling him in his affectation of ostentatious debauchery, his vices, and his insane prodigalities. From the first day of his reign the lower class hailed him by the name of Nero, and it appears that he himself adopted it in part of his correspondence. In any case he permitted statues of the Beast to be set up ; he re-established the Neronian clique in the great posts of state, and openly avowed that he intended to continue on the lines inaugurated in the last reign. The first warrant that he signed was one ordering the completion of the Golden House.

What was saddest of all was, that the political abasement which had been reached did not ensure security. The ignoble Vitellius had been proclaimed some days before Otho (January 2nd, 69) in Germany. He did not abandon his attempts. A horrible civil war, the like of which had not been known since that of Augustus and Anthony, seemed inevitable. The popular imagination was in a highly excited state ; men saw everywhere frightful prognostics ; the crimes of the soldiery spread terror on every hand. Néver had such a year been known ; the world ran with blood. The first battle of Bedriacum, which left the Empire to Vitellius alone (about April 15th), cost the lives of 80,000 men. The disbanded legionaries pillaged the country, and fought amongst themselves. The people joined in the strife ; it might have been called the downfall of society. At the same time astrologers and charlatans of every description swarmed ; the city of Rome was given over to them ; reason seemed confounded before a deluge of crimes and follies which defied all philosophy. Certain words of Jesus, which the Christians secretly repeated to one another, kept them in a kind of chronic fever ; the fate

of Jerusalem was, above all, a subject for ardent exercise of thought on their part.

The East, indeed, was not less troubled than the West. We have noted that from the month of June in 68, the military operations of the Romans against Jerusalem had been suspended. Anarchy and fanaticism did not, on that account, diminish among the Jews. The violence of John of Gischala and other zealots was at its height. John's authority was chiefly acknowledged by a body of Galileans who committed all excesses imaginable. The inhabitants of Jerusalem at last arose, and compelled John to take refuge with his Sicarii in the Temple; but he was feared so much, that as a defence against his deeds it was deemed necessary to set up a rival to oppose him. Simon, son of Gioras, a native of Gerasa, who had distinguished himself since the beginning of the war, was ravaging Idumæa with his brigandage. He had already had to struggle with the zealots, and twice he had made a threatening demonstration at the gates of Jerusalem. He returned there for the third time in answer to the appeal of the people, who believed they would thus be protected against a counter attack on the part of John. The new master entered Jerusalem in March, 69. John of Gischala remained in possession of the Temple. The two chiefs sought to surpass one another in ferocity. The Jew is cruel when he is master. The brother of the Carthaginian showed himself at the supreme hour in his true colours. The Jewish people has always had in its midst an admirable minority—therein is its glory; but never has so much jealousy, so much ardour in mutual extermination been known in any group of men. When he has reached a certain degree of exasperation, the Jew is capable of anything, even against his religion. The history of Israel is a picture of men at furious variance with one another. Without deviating from the truth, one may say as much good and as much ill as one likes about the race; for, let us repeat it, the good Jew is an excellent fellow, the wicked Jew a detestable fellow. This it is which explains the possibility of the apparently inconceivable phenomenon

the Gospel idyll and the horrors recounted by Josephus actually taking place in the same land, among the same people, about the same period.

During this time Vespasian was lingering inactive at Cæsarea. His son Titus had succeeded in involving him in a network of cunningly-woven intrigues. Under Galba, Titus had hoped to see himself adopted by the old Emperor. After Galba's death he understood that he could only reach supreme power in succession to his father. With the art of the most consummate of politicians, he was able to turn the chances in favour of a serious and upright general, lacking both brilliancy and personal ambition, who scarcely did aught to prosper his own fortunes. He had the assistance of the whole of the East. Mucianus and the Syrian legions suffered impatiently the sight of the legions of the West in sole control of the imperial destinies. They asserted their right to appoint the Emperor in their turn; but Mucianus, who was a kind of sceptic, more desirous of disposing power than of exercising it, did not wish the purple for himself. In spite of his old age, his middle-class birth, and his secondary intelligence, Vespasian thus found himself marked out for supreme power. Titus, who was twenty-eight years of age, made up, moreover, by his merit, his shrewdness, and his activity for the obscurities of his father's talent. It was only with reluctance that, after Otho's death, the Eastern legions took their oath of allegiance to Vitellius. The insolence of the Teutonic soldiery filled them with disgust. They had been led to believe that Vitellius desired to send his favourite legions into Syria, and order to the banks of the Rhine the Syrian legions which were popular in their country, and had become attached to it by many alliances.

Nero, too, although dead, still continued to hold the die of human affairs and the fable of his resurrection was not without some truth as a metaphor. His party survived him. Vitellius, following in the footsteps of Otho, posed, to the great delight of the common people, as an avowed admirer, an imitator, an avenger of Nero. He protested that, in his



opinion, Nero had provided a model of good government for the commonwealth. He honoured his memory with magnificent funeral rites, ordered his musical compositions to be performed, and at the first note rose in transports to lead the applause. Sensible and upright men, wearied of these miserable parodies of an abhorrent reign, wished for a strong reaction against Nero, against his men, against his buildings; above all, they demanded the rehabilitation of the noble victims of his tyranny. It was known that the Flavians would conscientiously play this part. Finally, the native princes of Syria strongly pronounced themselves for a chief in whom they saw a protector against the fanaticism of the Jewish rebels. Agrippa II. and his sister Berenice were attached body and soul to the cause of the two Roman generals. Berenice, though forty years of age, won the affections of Titus by secret arts, which a young, ambitious, hard-working man, a stranger to the world of fashion, uniquely concerned up till now with his own advancement, was unable to withstand. She even won the old Vespasian by her marks of amiability and her gifts. The two plebeian chiefs, until the present time poor and simple in their habits, were seduced by the aristocratic charm of a woman of admirable beauty, and by the externals of a brilliant society with which they had no acquaintance. The passion which Titus conceived for Berenice was in no way to the detriment of his own affairs; everything, on the contrary, goes to show that in this woman, an adept in Eastern intrigues, he found an agent of the most useful description. Thanks to her, the petty kings of Emesa, Sophena, and Commagene, all relatives or allies of the Herods and more or less converted to Judaism, were drawn into the conspiracy. The Jewish renegade, Tiberius Alexander, prefect of Egypt, gave it his hearty support, and even the Parthians declared themselves ready to lend it their aid.

What is most extraordinary of all is, that the moderate Jews, such as Josephus, also adhered to it, and spared no exertion to bestow on the Roman general the ideas which exercised their minds. We have seen that the Jewish members of

Nero's circle had succeeded in persuading him that, if dethroned at Rome, he would find a new kingdom at Jerusalem, which would make him the mightiest potentate on earth. Josephus asserts that in the year 67, when he was made prisoner by the Romans, he predicted to Vespasian the future, which, according to certain texts in his sacred Scriptures, was awaiting him. By dint of repeating their prophecies the Jews had succeeded in persuading a great number of people, even though unaffiliated to their sect, that the East was to win the day, and that the master of the world was soon to emerge from Judæa. Already Virgil had lulled the vague sadness of his melancholy imagination by applying to his period a *Cumæum Carmen*, which seems to have been in some way related to the oracles of the second Isaiah. The Magi, Chaldæans, and astrologers also used, for their own purposes, belief in a star of the East heralding a king of the Jews, reserved for high destinies; and the Christians took these wild imaginations quite seriously. Prophecy had a double meaning like all other oracles; it seemed sufficiently fulfilled if the chief of the legions of Syria, quartered some leagues from Jerusalem, succeeded to the Empire in Syria as the result of a Syrian popular movement. Vespasian and Titus, who were surrounded by Jews, gave ear to these discourses, and took pleasure in them. All the while they were using their military talents against the fanatics of Jerusalem, the two generals had certain leanings towards Judaism, studied it, and showed respect for Jewish books. Josephus, by his suave, easy, insinuating nature, had succeeded in getting on very familiar terms with them, especially with Titus. To them he boasted of his national Law, told them the old biblical stories which he often arranged in Greek form, and spoke mysteriously of prophecies. Other Jews shared the same sentiments and made Vespasian accept a kind of Messianic rôle. Miracles entered into the matter; there were rumours of healings, somewhat analogous to those recounted in the Gospels, being performed by this Christ of a new order.

The pagan priests of Phœnicia did not wish to lag behind in this competition in flattery. The oracle of Paphos and that of Carnel claimed to have foretold the fortunes of the Flavians. The consequences of all this developed later. The Flavian Emperors, who partly owed their success to Syrian support, were much more open to Syrian ideas than the disdainful Cæsars. Christianity penetrated into the very heart of this family, counted adherents among its members, and, thanks to it, entered on an entirely new phase in its destinies.

Towards the end of the spring of 69, Vespasian apparently desired to emerge from the military inaction which politics enforced on him. On April 29th he took the field and appeared with his cavalry before Jerusalem. While he was thus engaged, Cerealis, one of his lieutenants, burned Hebron. The whole of Judæa was submissive to the Romans, with the exception of Jerusalem and the three fortresses of Masada, Herodium, and Machero, which were held by the Sicarii. For the reduction of these four places sieges of an arduous nature would have been necessary, and in such Vespasian and Titus hesitated to engage, considering their precarious position, on the brink of a fresh civil war, in which they might require all the forces they could muster. Thus for another year was prolonged the revolution, which, for three years already, had kept Jerusalem in the most extraordinary state of crisis recorded in history.

On July 1st, Tiberius Alexander proclaimed Vespasian at Alexandria, and caused allegiance to be sworn to him; on the 3rd the army of Judæa saluted him as Augustus at Cæsarea; Mucianus at Antioch secured his recognition by the Syrian legions; and, on the 15th, the whole of the East was at his feet. A congress was held at Beyrout, at which it was decided that Mucianus should march upon Italy, while Titus continued the war against the Jews, and Vaspasian awaited the issue of events at Alexandria. After a sanguinary civil war (the third experienced within eighteen months) power definitely rested in the hands

of the Flavians. A middle-class dynasty, diligent in affairs of the state, moderate in views, lacking the strength of the race of the Cæsars, but also free from their eccentricities, thus disinherited the heirs of the title created by Augustus. Prodigals and madmen had so abused their privilege to act like spoilt children, that the accession of an honest man of no distinction, who had laboriously reached his position by his own merit, in spite of his little absurdities, his plebeian bearing, and his ignorance of polite usages, was hailed with delight. The fact is that the new dynasty for ten years managed the affairs of the state with good sense and judgment, saved the cause of Roman unity, and completely falsified the predictions of the Jews and Christians, who already in their dreams saw the Empire dismantled and Rome laid in ruins. The fire in the Capitol on December 19th, and the terrible massacre which took place in Rome on the following day, might have given them momentary cause to believe that the great day had arrived. But Vespasian's unopposed establishment in power (from December 20th onwards) apprised them that they must resign themselves to living on still, and forced them to find pretexts for the adjournment of their hopes to a more distant future.

The wise Vespasian, much less excited than those who fought to win the Empire for him, spent some time at Alexandria with Tiberius Alexander. He only returned to Rome about the month of July in the year 70, shortly before the absolute downfall of Jerusalem. Titus, instead of pushing on the war in Judæa, had followed his father to Egypt, where he remained with him until the beginning of March.

The strife in Jerusalem was only growing more aggravated. Fanatical movements are far from banishing from those who take part in them, hatred, jealousy, and mistrust; it is customary for men of strong convictions and passions to suspect one another, and herein there is an element of strength, for reciprocal suspicion inspires them with fear of one another, binds them together as with a chain

of iron, and prevents defections and momentary weaknesses. It is the artificial policy lacking all conviction, that proceeds with apparent concord and courtesy. Interest creates cliques; principles create division, tempt men to decimate, to cast out, to slay their foes. Those who judge human affairs through bourgeois spectacles believe that the revolutionary cause is lost when the revolutionists 'begin to eat one another.' On the contrary, it is a proof that the revolution possesses the fullest vigour, and that it is being urged forward by an impersonal ardour. This has never been more strikingly illustrated than in the terrible drama of Jerusalem. The actors seem to have between them an oath which it is death to break. Like those infernal dances in which, according to mediæval belief, Satan was to be seen forming the chain, and dragging to a fantastic pit files of men capering and holding one another by the hand, revolution permits none to escape from the dance which it leads. Terror stands behind the actors; in turn exalting and being exalted by others, they go on their way to the abyss. There can be no drawing back, for behind each is a hidden sword which, at the moment he would fain stop short, forces him forward.

Simon, son of Gioras, commanded in the city. John of Gischala with his assassins was master of the Temple. A third party came into existence under the leadership of Eleazar, son of Simon, a man of priestly race, which included some deserters from John of Gischala's Zelotes, and established itself in the inner enclosure of the Temple, where its adherents lived on the consecrated food that happened to be there, and on the provisions that were being constantly brought to the priests as first-fruit offerings. These three parties waged incessant warfare upon one another; they walked over heaps of corpses; the dead were no longer buried. Immense stores of grain had been collected which would have permitted years of resistance. John and Simon burned them in order to keep them out of each other's possession. The position of the inhabitants was horrible; peaceable folk prayed that order might be



restored by the Romans; all the outlets from the city were guarded by the terrorists, and there was no possibility of escape. And yet, strange as it may seem, pilgrims continued to come to the Temple from the ends of the earth. John and Eleazar received proselytes and profited by their offerings. Frequently the pious pilgrims were slain while in the midst of their sacrifices, along with the priests who repeated the liturgy to them, by the darts and stones of John's engines of war. The rebels actively busied themselves beyond the Euphrates in order to secure the assistance either of the Jews of these lands or of the king of the Parthians. They had imagined that all the Jews of the East would take up arms. The internecine wars of the Romans inspired them with wild hopes; like the Christians, they believed that the Empire was on the brink of dismemberment. In vain did Jesus, son of Hanan, walk through the streets of the city, calling on the four winds of heaven to come and destroy it; on the eve of their extermination, the fanatics proclaimed Jerusalem the capital of the world, just as we have seen Paris, besieged and famine-stricken, still maintaining that the whole world was in it, worked by its inspiration, suffered with it.

What is strangest of all is, that they were not altogether wrong. The Hierosolymite enthusiasts, who affirmed that Jerusalem was eternal even while she was burning, were far nearer the truth than those who saw in them only assassins. They were in error as to the military question, but not as to the ultimate religious outcome of the whole matter. These troublous days, indeed, marked well the moment at which Jerusalem became the spiritual capital of the world. The Apocalypse, the burning utterance of love which she inspired, has taken its place among the religious writings of mankind, and has consecrated in its pages the image of 'the beloved city.' Ah; what a mistake it is to foretell what in the future will be holy or infamous, mad or wise! An abrupt change in a ship's course makes progress a retrogression, a contrary wind a favourable wind. At the sight of these revolutions with their thunders and



earthquakes, let us take our place among the blessed who sing 'Praise be to God!' or with the four animals, spirits of the universe, who, after each act of the heavenly tragedy, cry, AMEN.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

AT last the iron circle closed once more round the doomed city, never again to be relaxed. As soon as the season permitted him, Titus left Alexandria, reached Cæsarea, and from that town advanced on Jerusalem at the head of a formidable army. With him he had four legions—the 5th *Macedonian*, the 10th *Fretensis*, the 12th *Fulminata*, and the 15th *Apollinaris*, without counting numerous auxiliary forces furnished by his Syrians, and many Arabs who came, attracted by the opportunity for pillage. All the Jews whom he had rallied to his cause, Agrippa, Tiberius Alexander, who had become Prætorian prefect, and Josephus, the future historian, accompanied him, while Berenice, no doubt, tarried at Cæsarea. The military capacity of the general responded to the strength of the army. Titus was a remarkable soldier, above all an excellent engineer officer: and, in addition, he was a man of good sense, a profound politician, and, considering the cruelty of the age, fairly humane. Vespasian, irritated by the satisfaction which the Jews manifested at seeing the outbreak of civil strife, and by their endeavours to bring about a Parthian invasion, had recommended great severity. Leniency was, in his opinion, always interpreted as a sign of weakness by these proud races, inspired with the conviction that they fought for God and with God.

The Roman army arrived at Gabaath-Saül, four and a half miles from Jerusalem, early in April. It was almost

the eve of the feast of the Passover, and an enormous number of Jews from all countries had congregated in the city. Josephus estimates the number of those who perished during the siege at eleven hundred thousand; it seemed as though the whole nation had purposely met for extermination. About April 10th, Titus pitched his camp at the angle of the Tower of Psephinus (now Kasr-Djaloud). Some partial successes won by surprise and a grave wound received by Titus, gave the Jews, at the outset, an exaggerated confidence in their own strength, and taught the Romans with what precautions it was necessary for them to defend themselves in this war of furious fanaticism.

The city might have been counted among the strongest in the world. The walls were a perfect example of those structures fashioned in enormous blocks of stone always in high esteem in Syria; in the interior, the Temple enclosure, that of the upper town, and that of Acra, formed as it were partition walls, and had the appearance of so many ramparts. The number of the defenders was very great; the stock of provisions, although diminished by the fires, was still abundant. The factions inside the city continued to fight amongst themselves, but they united for defence. After the Passover feast, Eleazar's party almost disappeared and was absorbed in that of John. Titus conducted the siege with consummate ability; never before had the Romans displayed such skill in attacking a strong place. By the early days of April the legions had crossed the outer line of ramparts on the northern side, and were masters of that portion of the city. Five days later the second wall, that of Acra, was stormed. Half of the city was thus in the power of the Romans. On May 12th they attacked the fortress of Antonia. Surrounded as he was by Jews who all, with the possible exception of Tiberius Alexander, desired the preservation of the city and the Temple, dominated, more than he cared to avow, by his love for Berenice who appears to have been a pious Jewess extremely devoted to her nation, Titus is said to have sought for means to come to terms, and to have made acceptable

offers. All was in vain : the besieged only replied to the victor's proposals with sarcasms.

The siege then took a horribly cruel form. The Romans displayed apparatus for the most hideous tortures, but the Jews' audacity only waxed the greater. On May 27th and 29th they burned the engines of the Romans and carried the attack into their very camp. Discouragement set in amongst the besiegers ; many were persuaded that the Jews were right and that Jerusalem really was impregnable ; desertion commenced. Titus, renouncing the hope of taking the place by storm, established a close blockade. A line of contravallation hurriedly thrown up (at the beginning of June), and supported in the direction of Peræa by a line of *castella* crowning the summits of the Mount of Olives, entirely cut off the city from outside. Up till the present, vegetables had been procured from the surrounding country ; but now, however, the famine became terrible. The fanatics, who were provided with the necessities of life, cared little ; rigorous requisitions, accompanied with tortures, were made for the discovery of hidden stores of grain. Whoever bore a certain air of health passed for being guilty of concealing provisions. Men tore morsels of bread from one another's mouths. The most terrible diseases broke out in the midst of this huddled mass of humanity, weakened and enfevered as it was. Frightful rumours got into circulation and redoubled the terror.

From this time forth, hunger, rage, despair, and madness dwelt in Jerusalem. It was a cage of furious maniacs, a city resounding with howling and inhabited by cannibals, a very hell. Titus, for his part, was atrociously vindictive ; every day five hundred unfortunates were crucified in sight of the city with hateful refinements of cruelty ; there was no longer sufficient wood to make crosses or sufficient ground whereon to erect them.

In this excess of evils the faith and fanaticism of the Jews were more fervent than ever. The Temple was believed to be indestructible. The majority were convinced that the city being under the special protection of

the Eternal, it was impossible that it could be captured. Prophets wandered among the people announcing succour to be near at hand. Confidence in this matter was such, that many who had the opportunity of saving themselves remained to witness the miracle of Jehovah. Raving fanatics, however, reigned as masters. All those who were suspected of counselling surrender were slain. Thus perished, by order of Simon, son of Gioras, the pontiff Matthias, who had caused that brigand to be admitted into the city. His three sons were put to death before his eyes. Several persons of distinction were also executed. The assemblage of the smallest number of people together was forbidden, the simple fact of mourning in company or of inviting guests, was a crime. Josephus, from the Roman camp, vainly endeavoured to gather information; he was suspected by both sides. The situation had reached a point at which neither reason nor moderation had any longer a chance of making themselves heard.

Titus, however, was growing wearied of these delays. His one absorbing thought was now of Rome, its splendours and its pleasures; a city taken by famine seemed to him an exploit insufficient to give a dynasty a brilliant inauguration. He accordingly had four new *aggeres* constructed with a view to a determined assault by storm. In twenty-one days all was ready. On July 1st the Jews attempted the manœuvre which, on its first occasion, had been successful; they made a sortie for the purpose of burning the wooden towers, but their design was completely frustrated. From that day the fate of the city was irrevocably sealed. On July 2nd the Romans began to batter and undermine the tower of Antonia. On the 5th, Titus won it and had it almost entirely demolished, that he might open a wide passage through which his cavalry and engines of war could concentrate on the point to which all his efforts converged, and at which the supreme conflict was to be fought.

The Temple, as we have pointed out, was, by its peculiar plan of construction, the most formidable of the fortresses. The Jews who had entrenched themselves there with John

of Gischala prepared for battle. The priests themselves were under arms. On the 17th, the observation of perpetual sacrifice ceased, in default of ministers to offer it. This made a great impression on the people, and the news spread outside the city. For the Jews, interruption of sacrifice was as grave a phenomenon as would have been a check to the march of the universe. Josephus seized the occasion to make a fresh attempt to combat John's obstinacy. The fortress of Antonia was only sixty-five yards distant from the Temple. From the parapets of the tower Josephus cried in Hebrew by order of Titus (if, at least, the narrative of the *War of the Jews* does not deceive us) that John might retire with as many of his men as he wished, that Titus took upon himself to see that the lawful sacrifices were carried on by the Jews, and that he even permitted John to choose those who were to offer them. John refused to listen to these proposals. Those who were not blinded by fanaticism now took refuge with the Romans. All who remained chose death.

On July 12th Titus commenced his advance on the Temple. The struggle was of the most sanguinary description. On the 28th the Romans were masters of the whole of the northern gallery, from the fortress of Antonia to the valley of Kedron. The attack was then directed on the Temple itself. On August 2nd the most powerful engines were set to batter down the admirably-constructed walls of the exedræ which surrounded the inner courts. The effect of this was scarcely perceptible, but on the 8th the Romans succeeded in setting fire to the gates. The Jews were inexpressibly stunned, for they had never believed it possible; at the sight of the blazing flames they poured upon the Romans a flood of curses.

On August 9th Titus gave orders for the fire to be extinguished, and held a council of war at which Tiberius Alexander, Cerealis, and his principal officers were present. The question to be settled was whether the Temple should be burned. Several were of opinion that so long as the edifice was left standing the Jews would not remain at rest.



As to Titus, it is difficult to know what his view was, for on this point we have two opposed accounts. According to Josephus, Titus wished to save so admirable a building, the preservation of which would do honour to his reign and prove the moderation of the Romans. According to Tacitus, Titus insisted on the necessity of destroying an edifice with which were connected two superstitions, equally dangerous, that of the Jews and that of the Christians. 'These two superstitions,' he is alleged to have added, 'although opposed to one another, have the same source. The Christians proceed from the Jews; once the root is torn up the offshoot will soon perish.'

It is difficult to decide between two versions so absolutely irreconcilable; for, while the opinion attributed to Titus by Josephus may very well be regarded as an invention of that historian, jealously anxious to show his patron's sympathy with Judaism, to absolve him in the eyes of the Jews of the evil deed of having destroyed the Temple, and to satisfy the ardent desire which Titus had to pass as a very moderate man, it cannot be denied that the brief speech placed by Tacitus in the mouth of the victorious captain was, not only in style but in the order of ideas, an exact reflection of the views of Tacitus himself. We have a right to suppose that the Latin historian, full as he was of the contempt, the malevolence for Christians and Jews characteristic of the epoch of Trajan and the Antonines, has made Titus speak like one of the Roman aristocrats of the age, while, in reality, the bourgeois Titus had more regard for Oriental superstitions than had the high-born nobility which succeeded the Flavians. Having lived for three years with the Jews, who had boasted to him of their Temple as the wonder of the world, and having been won over by the caresses of Josephus, Agrippa, and, more especially, of Berenice, he might very well have desired the preservation of a sanctuary, the worship of which was represented by several of his familiar friends as being entirely peaceful in tendency. It is possible, therefore, that, as Josephus asserts, orders were given to extinguish the flames kindled on the

previous day, and that, in view of the frightful tumult anticipated, measures were taken against incendiarism. In the character of Titus, along with real goodness, there was much pretension and a little hypocrisy. No doubt the truth of the matter is that he neither ordered the conflagration, as Tacitus asserts, nor forbade it as Josephus asserts, but that he simply allowed it to be made, not without keeping up appearances calculated to support all the opinions that it might be to his advantage to have maintained in the different regions of public opinion. Whatever the real facts of this difficult point, a general assault on the building, already deprived of its gates, was decided on. For experienced soldiers what still remained to be done was an effort, sanguinary perhaps, but one the result of which was in no way doubtful.

The Jews anticipated the attack. On the morning of August 10th they engaged in a furious conflict, but without success. Titus retired inside the Antonia to seek rest and prepare for the morrow's assault. A detachment was left behind to prevent the fire being rekindled. Then, according to Josephus, took place the incident which brought about the ruin of the sacred edifice. The Jews, in a state of fury, threw themselves upon the detachment mounting guard over the fire; the Romans repulsed them and entered pell mell into the Temple with the fugitives. The irritation of the Romans was at its height. A soldier 'without orders from any man and as though impelled by some supernatural force' took a blazing piece of wood, and, having been lifted up by one of his comrades, cast the firebrand through a window which looked out on the *exedrae* on the northern side. Flames and smoke rose rapidly. Messengers ran to inform Titus who at the moment was resting in his tent. Then, if Josephus is to be believed, a kind of struggle ensued between him and his soldiers. Titus with word and gesture ordered the fire to be extinguished; but the disorder was so great that he was not understood, and those who could not doubt his intentions pretended not to hear. In place of checking the conflagration, the legionaries stirred it

up. Dragged along by the flood of invaders, Titus was carried into the Temple itself. As yet the flames had not reached the central building. He saw intact the sanctuary of which Agrippa, Josephus, and Berenice had so many times spoken to him with admiration, and found that it surpassed the description which he had been given. Titus redoubled his efforts, caused the interior to be evacuated, and even ordered Liberalis, the centurion of his guards, to strike those who should refuse to obey. All at once a burst of flame and smoke rose from the gate of the Temple. At the moment of the disorderly evacuation, a soldier had set fire to the interior. The flames were gaining on every side; the position was no longer tenable; Titus retired.

This narrative of Josephus transgresses probability more than once. It is difficult to believe that the Roman legions could have shown such disrespect towards a victorious leader. Dion Cassius, on the contrary, asserts that Titus found it necessary to use force to make his soldiers decide on penetrating into a place haunted by terrors, all profaners of which were said to have been smitten down by death. The one thing alone certain is that Titus, some years later, was well pleased that, in the Jewish world, the affair should be related as Josephus had done, and that the burning of the Temple should be attributed to the lack of discipline among his soldiers, or rather to the supernatural action of some unconscious instrument of a higher power. The *History of the War of the Jews* was written about the end of Vespasian's reign, at the earliest in 76, when Titus was already aspiring to be 'the darling of the human race' and anxious to pass for being a model of refinement and goodness. In preceding years, and in a world other than that of the Jews, he had certainly accepted eulogies of a different nature. Among the scenes shown at the triumph of the year 71, was the representation of 'fire being set to temples' without, assuredly, anyone seeking then to exhibit the deed as being other than glorious. About the same time, the court poet, Valerius Flaccus, proposes to Domitian as the finest use to which his poetical talent can be put, to sing

the war in Judæa, and represent his brother sowing on every hand incendiary torches.

*Solymo nigrantem pulvere fratrem,  
Spargentemque faces et in omni turre furentem.*

Meanwhile the conflict was being fiercely waged in the courts and open spaces. There was frightful carnage around the altar, a kind of truncated pyramid surmounted by a platform which stood before the Temple; the corpses of those who were slain on the platform rolled down the steps and went to swell the heap at the foot. Streams of blood flowed on every side, and nothing was to be heard but the piercing cries of the mortally wounded, who died calling upon heaven. There was still time to take refuge in the upper part of the city; but many preferred to await death, regarding death for their sanctuary as a fate worthy of envy, whilst others threw themselves into the flames, rushed upon the Romans' swords, ran themselves through the body, or slew each other. Priests who had succeeded in climbing to the ridge of the Temple roof, tore off the spikes with their leaden fastenings and threw them on the Romans. They continued until the moment when they were wrapped in flames. A great number of Jews had assembled round the holy place on the assurance of a prophet who had assured them that there and then God was to reveal signs of salvation for them. A gallery to which six thousand of these unhappy beings (who were nearly all women and children) had withdrawn was burnt. Two gates of the Temple and a part of the enclosure reserved for women were alone temporarily held. The Romans planted their standards in the place where the sanctuary had stood, and, as was their custom, offered them worship.

There still remained the old Zion, the upper town, the strongest part of the city, with its ramparts still intact, in which John of Gischala, Simon, son of Gioras, and a great number of combatants, who had succeeded in cutting their way through the victors, had taken refuge. This rallying

place of desperate men exacted a fresh siege. John and Simon had made the palace of the Herods the central position of their resistance; it was situated almost on the site of the present citadel of Jerusalem, and was protected by the three enormous towers of Hippicus, Phasaël, and Mariamne. To capture this last refuge of Jewish obstinacy, it was necessary for the Romans to construct *aggeres* against the western wall of the city opposite the palace. In this task the four legions were engaged for eighteen days (from August 20th to September 6th). Meanwhile, Titus made the conflagration spread over the different parts of the city now in his power. The lower town especially, and Ophel, as far as Siloam, were systematically destroyed. Many of the middle-class Jews were able to escape. As for people of the lower class, they were sold into slavery at very low prices. This was the origin of a whole cloud of Jewish slaves who, swarming over Italy and the other Mediterranean countries, bore thither the elements of a new ardour for propaganda. Josephus estimates the number at 97,000. Titus pardoned the princes of Adiabene. The pontifical vestments, the precious stones, the tables, the cups, the candlesticks, and the hangings were delivered up to him. He ordered them to be carefully preserved that they might be included in the triumph in preparation for him, to which he specially desired to give a form characteristic of foreign pomp by the display of the rich material elements of Jewish worship.

The *aggeres* having been completed, the Romans began to batter the wall of the upper city; with the first attack (September 7th) they threw down part of it as well as some towers. Worn out with hunger, and preyed upon by fever and fury, the defenders were now mere skeletons. The legions forced an entrance without difficulty. Until the close of the day the soldiers burned and slew. The majority of the houses which they entered for plunder were full of corpses. The unhappy wretches who were able to make their escape took refuge in Acra, which the Roman troops had almost evacuated, and in those vast subterranean



caverns which honeycomb the earth below Jerusalem. At this moment John and Simon gave way. They still held the towers of Hippicus, Phasaël and Mariamne, the most astounding works of military architecture in antiquity. The battering-ram would have been powerless against enormous blocks of stone, fitted together with unequalled perfection, and fastened to one another with iron bands. Lost and distracted, John and Simon left these impregnable works and sought to force the line of contravallation in the direction of Siloam. Unsuccessful in this, they went to rejoin those of their partizans who had hidden in the sewers.

By the 8th all resistance was at an end. The soldiers were tired. They killed the infirm who could not walk. The rest, including women and children, were driven like a flock of sheep to the Temple enclosure and shut up in the inner court, which had escaped the flames. This multitude, penned together for death or slavery, was divided into classes. All who had taken part in the fighting were massacred. Seven hundred of the tallest and best proportioned among the younger people were reserved to figure in the triumph of Titus. Of the others, those who had passed the age of seventeen were sent, with irons on their feet, into Egypt to do hard labour, or distributed among the provinces to be slaughtered in the amphitheatres. Those below the age of seventeen were sold. The sorting out of the prisoners lasted several days, during which thousands are said to have died, some because no food was given them, others because they refused to accept it.

The Romans employed the days following in burning the rest of the city, in throwing down the walls, and in searching the sewers and subterranean passages. There they found great quantities of treasure, many insurgents still alive, who were killed on the spot, and more than two thousand corpses, not to speak of some captives whom the terrorists had imprisoned. John of Gischala, compelled by hunger to come forth, asked the conquerors for quarter, and was condemned to imprisonment for life. Simon, son of Gioras, who had a supply of provisions,



remained in hiding until the end of October. Lacking then for sustenance, he adopted a singular course. Clad in a white under-garment and a purple robe, he unexpectedly emerged from beneath the ground at the place where the Temple had stood. By this he imagined he might astonish the Romans, simulate a resurrection, and perhaps pass himself off as the Messiah. The soldiers, in fact, were at first somewhat surprised. Simon refused to give his name to anyone save their commander Terentius Rufus. The latter put him in chains, sent word to Titus who was at Paneas, and dispatched the prisoner to Cæsarea.

The Temple and the other great buildings were razed to their foundations. The basement of the Temple was however preserved, and constitutes what is now called the Haram esh-Sherif. Titus also wished to retain the three towers of Hippicus, Phasaël, and Mariamne, that posterity might know against what walls he had had to struggle. The western wall was left standing to shelter the camp of the Tenth *Fretensis* legion, which was to garrison the ruins of the conquered city. Lastly, there were some buildings on the extremity of Mount Zion which escaped destruction and remained as isolated ruins. All the rest disappeared. From the month of September 70 to about the year 122, when Hadrian rebuilt it under the name of *Ælia Capitolina*, Jerusalem was but a field of rubbish heaps, in a corner of which were ranged the tents of a legion keeping constant watch. At every instant men expected to see the fires that were smouldering under these calcined stones burst forth anew, and feared lest the spirit of life should return to these corpses which, from the depths of their charnel-house, seemed still to raise their arms to affirm that they had with them the promises of eternity.

## CHAPTER XX

### CONSEQUENCES OF THE RUIN OF JERUSALEM

TITUS appears to have remained for about a month in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, offering sacrifices and rewarding his soldiers. The booty and the prisoners were sent to Cæsarea. The season, which was already far advanced, prevented the young captain from starting for Rome. He spent the winter in visiting different cities in the East and giving festivals. With him he dragged bands of Jewish prisoners, who were given to wild beasts, or burned alive, or forced to fight with one another. At Paneas on October 24th, the birthday of his brother Domitian, more than two thousand five hundred Jews perished in the flames or in horrible sports. At Beyrout, on November 17th, the same number of captives was sacrificed to celebrate the birthday of Vespasian. Hatred of the Jews was the dominant feeling in the Syrian towns, and these hideous massacres were hailed with delight. Perhaps the most disgusting element in the whole business is, that Josephus and Agrippa did not leave Titus during this time and were witnesses of his monstrosities.

Titus then went on a long tour through Syria and as far as the Euphrates. At Antioch he found the population exasperated against the Jews. They were accused of being the authors of a conflagration which had almost consumed the city. Titus contented himself with abrogating the tables of bronze on which their privileges were graven. He presented to the city of Antioch the winged *cherubim* which

formerly covered the ark. This singular trophy was placed before the great western gate of the town, which thence acquired the name of the Gate of the Cherubim. It was here that he consecrated a chariot to Luna, in return for the succour she had lent him during the siege. At Daphne he caused a theatre to be built on the site of the synagogue ; and an inscription indicated that this monument had been constructed with the spoils won in Judæa. From Antioch Titus returned to Jerusalem. There he found the Tenth *Fretensis*, under the command of Terentius Rufus, still engaged in searching the underground vaults of the ruined city. The appearance of Simon, son of Gioras, from the sewers, when it was believed that no one was still hiding in them, had caused the subterranean battues to be resumed ; and every day, in fact, some poor wretch and new treasures were discovered. When he beheld the solitude which he had created, Titus, it is said, could not restrain himself from an impulse of pity. The Jews of his circle were exercising a growing influence over him. The phantasmagoria of an Eastern empire, the glowing splendours of which had been displayed before the eyes of Nero and Vespasian, was revived for him, and even caused offence to be taken at Rome. Agrippa, Berenice, Josephus, and Tiberius Alexander enjoyed higher favour than ever, and many augured for Berenice the part of a new Cleopatra. On the morrow of the rebels' defeat irritation was felt at the sight of people of this kind honoured and all-powerful. As to Titus, he more and more accepted the idea that he was fulfilling a providential mission. It pleased him to hear prophecies quoted in which, it was represented, there was reference to himself. Josephus asserts that he ascribed his victory to God, and recognised that he had been granted supernatural favour. What is most striking of all is, that Philostratus, a hundred and twenty years later, fully admits the truth of this statement, and makes it the occasion for an apocryphal correspondence between Titus and his hero, Apollonius. If we are to believe his account of the matter, Titus refused the crowns which were offered to him, alleging that it was

not he who had taken Jerusalem, that he had done naught but serve as agent of a wrathful god. It is scarcely admissible that Philostratus knew the passage in Josephus. He borrowed from the legend, which had passed into a commonplace, of the moderation of Titus.

Titus returned to Rome about May or June in 71. He was bent on a triumph that should surpass all that had ever been seen before. The simplicity, the seriousness, the somewhat plebeian tastes of Vespasian were not of a nature to give him prestige amongst a population which had been accustomed to demand, before all else, of its sovereigns prodigality and a lordly bearing. Titus considered that a solemn entrance into the city would have a fine effect, and on this point succeeded in overcoming the objections of his aged father. The ceremony was organised with all the skill of contemporary Roman scenic artists; what chiefly distinguished it was the attempt at achieving local colour and historical truth. Pleasure was also taken in reproducing the simple rites of the Roman religion, as though it were desired to oppose it to the vanquished faith. At the beginning of the ceremony, Vespasian figured as Pontiff, his head more than half veiled in his toga, and said the solemn prayers; after him Titus prayed according to the same rite. The procession was a marvel; in it figured all the curiosities and rarities of the world, the precious productions of Oriental art by the side of the finished works of Græco-Roman art; apparently, on the morrow of the greatest peril which the Empire had ever run, it was held desirable to make a pompous display of its wealth. Scaffoldings on wheels, rising to the height of three or four storeys, excited universal admiration. On them were depicted all the episodes of the war, each series of tableaux terminating with a vivid representation of the strange apparition of Bar-Gioras and the way in which he had been taken. The pale faces and haggard eyes of the captives were dissimulated by the superb garments in which they had been clad. In their midst was Bar-Gioras led to his death with a great display of pomp. Then came

the spoils of the Temple, the golden table, the golden candlestick with its seven branches, the purple veils of the Holy of Holies, and, to close the series of trophies, that which most essentially was captive and vanquished and guilty, the book of the *Thora*. Those in whose honour the triumph was marshalled closed the procession. Vespasian and Titus rode in two separate chariots. Titus was beaming; as for Vespasian, who in all this only saw a day lost for business, he was bored, did not attempt to conceal his commonplace bearing of the busy man, expressed his impatience at the procession not moving more quickly, and said under his breath, 'It serves me right! . . . I have richly deserved it! . . . Could I have been more absurd? . . . And at my time of life too!' Domitian, richly dressed and mounted on a magnificent horse, curveted round his father and elder brother.

The procession arrived at length by way of the Via Sacra at the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, the usual goal for triumphal marches. At the foot of the *Clivus Capitolinus*, a halt was made for the performance of the gloomy part of the ceremony, the execution of the hostile chiefs. This hateful custom was carried out to the letter. Bar-Gioras, haled forth from the troop of captives, was dragged by a cord round his neck, with ignoble outrages, to the Tarpeian Rock, where he was put to death. When a shriek announced that the enemy of Rome was no more, a mighty shout arose, and the sacrifices commenced. After the usual prayers, the princes retired to the Palatine; and the remainder of the day was spent by the whole city in joy and feasting.

The volume of the *Thora* and the hangings of the sanctuary were carried to the imperial palace. The articles made of gold, more especially the table for 'shew bread' and the candlestick, were placed in a great edifice built by Vespasian opposite the Palatine, on the other side of the Via Sacra, under the name of the Temple of Peace, which, in some measure, formed the museum of the Flavians. An arch of triumph in Pentelic marble, which still exists, served



as a memorial of this extraordinary display of pomp, and bore the image of the principal objects carried in the procession. Father and son took on this occasion the title of *Imperatores*; but they repudiated the epithet of Judaical, either because the name of Judæi was in some measure odious and absurd to their ears; or to indicate that the war in Judæa had been, not a war against an alien people, but simply the suppression of a slaves' revolt; or in consequence of some secret thought analogous to that, of which the exaggerated expression has been handed down to us by Josephus and Philostratus. A coinage in which was imaged Judæa in chains, weeping under a palm tree, with the legend, *IVDÆA CAPTA, IVDÆA DEVICTA*, formed the memorial of the fundamental exploit of the Flavian dynasty. Coins of this kind continued to be minted until the reign of Domitian.

The victory, indeed, was complete. A captain of our own race, of our own blood, a man like ourselves, at the head of legions in the rolls of which, had we an opportunity of reading them, we might happen on the names of many of our ancestors, had just razed to the ground the fortress of Semiticism, and inflicted on theocracy, that formidable foe to civilisation, the most crushing defeat which it had ever experienced. It was the triumph of Roman law, or rather of rational law, an entirely philosophical creation presupposing no revelation, over the Jewish *Thora*, the fruit of a revelation. This system of law, the roots of which were to some extent Greek, but in which the practical genius of the Latins played so distinguished a part, was the valuable gift which the vanquished received from Rome in exchange for their independence. Each Roman victory was a step forward for the cause of reason; Rome dowered the world with a principle in many respects superior to that of the Jews—the secular state, founded on a purely civil conception of society. Every patriotic effort is worthy of respect, but the Zelotes were not merely patriots: they were fanatics, Sicarii wielding an insupportable tyranny. What they desired was the enforcement of a law of blood,



which permitted the evil thinker to be stoned to death. What they opposed was common equity, laical and liberal, which does not disquiet itself with the beliefs of individuals. Liberty of conscience was in the long run destined to emerge from Roman law, but it would never have proceeded from Judaism. Judaism could only give birth to the synagogue or the church, censorships of manners and customs, compulsory morality, the convent, a world like that of the fifth century, in which humanity would have lost all its vigour had not the barbarians come to restore it to health. Better, in fact, the reign of the man of war than the temporal reign of the priest; for the man of war does not harass the spirit under his sway, and thought is free, while the priest demands of his subjects the impossible, that is to say, belief in certain things and a faculty for always finding them true.

In many respects, therefore, the Roman triumph was legitimate. Jerusalem had become an impossibility; left to themselves, the Jews would have demolished it. But one great lacuna was to render this victory of Titus unfruitful. Our Western races, in spite of their superiority, have always shown a deplorable lack of religious originality. To derive from Roman or Gaulish religion anything analogous to the Church was an impossible undertaking. But every victory won over a religion is useless if it be not replaced by another responding at least as well as the former to the needs of the heart. Jerusalem was to avenge herself for her defeat; she was to conquer Rome by Christianity, Persia by Islamism, to destroy the fatherland of antiquity, and to become for the saintliest souls the city of the spirit. The most dangerous tendency of her *Thora*, a law at once moral and civil, giving precedence to social over military and political questions, was to dominate in the Church. During the whole of the Middle Ages, the individual, censured, kept under the vigilant supervision of the community, was to dread rebuke from the pulpit, tremble at the prospect of excommunication. And herein there was a just reaction from the moral indifference of pagan

societies, a protest against the insufficiency of Roman institutions for the amelioration of the individual. It is assuredly a detestable principle to accord religious communities the power to coerce their members; it is a still worse error to believe that there is a religion which is the right one, to the exclusion of all others—the right religion being for each man that which makes him gentle, just, humble, and amiable. But the question of human government is difficult; the ideal is very high, and the earth very low; unless one exclusively haunts the desert of the philosopher, nothing is to be met at every step but madness, dulness, and passion. The sages of antiquity only succeeded in securing some measure of authority by impostures which, in default of material force, gave them an imaginary power. Where would civilization be now, if for centuries it had not been believed that the Brahmin could blast with his gaze, if the barbarians had not been convinced of the reality of the terrible vengeance of St Martin of Tours? Man has need of a moral schooling, for which the cares of family and state are insufficient.

In the intoxication of success, Rome scarce remembered that the Jewish insurrection was still alive in the basin of the Dead Sea. Three fortresses, Herodium, Machero, and Masada, still remained in the hands of the Jews. To cherish hopes of success after the capture of Jerusalem, meant voluntary and deliberate blindness to evidence. The rebels defended themselves with as much obstinacy as though the struggle were just beginning. Herodium was scarcely more than a fortified palace; it was taken, without much effort, by Lucilius Bassus. Machero offered many difficulties; atrocities, massacres, and sales of whole flocks of Jews began once more. Masada made one of the most heroic resistances recorded in military history. Eleazar, son of Jaïrus, grandson of Judas the Gaulonite, had seized this fortress in the early days of the revolt, and had made it a haunt of Zelotes and Sicarii. Masada occupies a plateau on the summit of a huge rock, nearly 1600 feet high, on the shore of the Dead Sea. To capture such

a place, Fulvius Silva had to perform veritable miracles. The Jews' despair was beyond bounds when they saw themselves vanquished in a place of refuge which they had deemed impregnable. At Eleazar's instigation they slew one another and set fire to their property which they had piled up in a heap. Nine hundred and sixty persons perished thus. The tragic episode occurred on April 15th, 72.

Judæa, as a consequence of these events, was shaken to her very foundations. Vespasian ordered all the lands which, owing to the death or captivity of their proprietors, had become ownerless to be sold. Apparently the idea, which later occurred to Hadrian, of rebuilding Jerusalem under another name, and establishing a colony in it, was suggested to him. This, however, he did not wish, and he annexed the whole country to the Emperor's domains proper. He only gave, to eight hundred veterans, the town of Emmaus near Jerusalem, and made a little colony of it, a trace of which has been preserved to the present day in the name of the pretty village of Kulônîeh. A special tribute (*fiscus*) was levied on the Jews. Throughout the Empire they had to pay annually to the Capitol the sum of two drachmas which, up till then, they had been accustomed to pay to the Temple at Jerusalem. The little circle of allied Jews, which included Josephus, Agrippa, Berenice, and Tiberius Alexander, chose Rome as their place of sojourn. We shall see them there continuing to play a part of considerable importance, now securing for Judaism temporary favour at court, now pursued by the hatred of exalted believers, now conceiving more than one hope, notably when there was every probability that Berenice would become the wife of Titus and hold the sceptre of the universe.

Reduced to a solitude, Judæa remained tranquil; but the tremendous upheaval of which she had been the scene continued to provoke violent reactions in the neighbouring countries. The ferment of Judaism lasted until about the end of the year 73. The Zelotes who had escaped massacre,

the volunteers of the siege, all the madmen of Jerusalem, spread through Egypt and Cyrenaica. The communities of these countries, wealthy, conservative, and far removed from Palestinian fanaticism, perceived into what perils these cut-throats brought them. They took upon themselves to arrest and hand them over to the Romans. Many fled as far as upper Egypt, where they were hunted down like wild beasts. At Cyrene one of the Sicarii called Jonathan, a weaver by trade, set up as a prophet, and, like all the false Messiahs, persuaded two thousand *ebionim*, or poor men, to follow him into the desert, where he promised to show them miracles and startling apparitions. The sensible Jews denounced him to Catullus, the governor of the country, but Jonathan avenged himself on them by counter-accusations which brought about endless troubles. Nearly the whole of the Jewish community of Cyrene, one of the most flourishing in the world, was exterminated and its property confiscated in the Emperor's name. Catullus, who in this affair showed much cruelty, was disavowed by Vespasian. He died amid frightful hallucinations, which, according to certain conjectures, furnished the subject matter of a theatrical piece with fantastic scenery, called 'The Spectre of Catullus.'

Incredible as it may seem, this long and terrible agony was not immediately followed by death. Under Trajan and under Hadrian, we shall see national Judaism revive and again engage in bloody conflicts; but undoubtedly its fate was sealed, and the Zelotes finally crushed. The path shown by Jesus, and instinctively understood by the heads of the Church of Jerusalem in refuge in Peræa, unmistakably became the true path for Israel to follow. The temporal kingdom of the Jews had been hateful, harsh and cruel; the Asmonæan epoch, when they enjoyed independence, was the darkest epoch in their history. Was the downfall of Herodianism and Sadduceeism, the shameful alliance of an imperial power that lacked all grandeur with the priesthood, something to be regretted? Assuredly not; the 'people of God' had another goal than this. It required

blindness to facts not to see that the ideal institutions sought by 'God's Israel' did not require national independence for their realisation. These institutions, being incapable of creating an army, could only exist in a state of vassalage to a great empire which left a wide latitude of freedom to its subjects of alien faiths, ridding them of political cares, and demanding of them no military service. The empire of Achæmenes had entirely satisfied these necessities of Jewish life; later, the Caliphate and the Ottoman Empire were again to satisfy such conditions, and to see growing up in their midst free communities like those of the Armenians, the Parsis, and the Greeks, nations without a fatherland, brotherhoods which replaced diplomatic and military autonomy by the autonomy of college and Church.

The Roman Empire was not sufficiently flexible to adapt itself in this way to the necessities of the communities which it absorbed. Of the four empires, it was, in Jewish opinion, the hardest and most wicked. Like Antiochus Epiphanes, the Roman Empire made the Jewish people wander from its true vocation in leading it, by force of reaction, to form a kingdom or separate state. This tendency was in no sense that of the men who represented the genius of the race. In some respects these latter preferred the Romans. Each day the conception of a Jewish nationality tended to become an idea out-worn, an idea upheld by madmen and frenzied enthusiasts, against which pious men made no scruple of invoking the protection of the conquerors. The true Jew, attached to the *Thora*, making holy books his rule and his life as much as the Christian, lost in the hope of his kingdom of God, more and more renounced all earthly nationality. The principles of Judas the Gaulonite, which were the soul of the great revolt, anarchist principles according to which, God alone being master, no man has a right to take that title upon himself, might produce bands of fanatics similar to Cromwell's Independents; they could found nothing durable. These feverish outbreaks were the outward signs



of the great travail consuming the womb of Israel, which, by making her pour forth her blood in the cause of humanity, necessarily caused her to perish amid terrible convulsions.

In truth, the nations must make their choice between the long, tranquil, obscure destiny of him who lives for himself, and the troubled and stormy career of him who lives for mankind. The nation that excites itself over social and religious problems is almost always feeble as a nation. Every country that dreams of a kingdom of God, that spends its life in the cause of general ideas, that pursues a task of universal interest, sacrifices thereby its own special destiny, weakens and destroys its power to play its part as one of the kingdoms of the earth. It was thus with Judæa, with Greece, with Italy; France will perhaps share the same fate. We must pay the price if we bear fire within us. Jerusalem, as a city of bourgeois mediocrity, might have indefinitely continued its undistinguished history. It is because it had the incomparable honour of being the cradle of Christianity, that it fell a victim to John's of Gischala and Bar-Gioras's, to all appearance scourges of their native land, in reality the instruments of her apotheosis. Those zealots whom Josephus treats as brigands and assassins were politicians of a low order, soldiers of small capacity; but they heroically lost a country which could not be saved. They brought about the ruin of a material city; they inaugurated the reign of the spiritual Jerusalem which, seated in desolation, is far more glorious than she was in the days of Herod and of Solomon.

What was it, indeed, that the conservatives and Sadducees desired? Their desire was paltry—the continued existence of a city of priests like Emesa, or Tyana, or Comona. Assuredly they were not mistaken when they affirmed that outbreaks of enthusiasts spelt national ruin. Revolution and Messianism ruined the national existence of the Jewish people; but revolution and Messianism were the true vocation of that people, its contribution to the universal work of civilization. Nor are we mistaken when



we say to France : 'Renounce revolution or you are lost'; but if the future belongs to some one of the ideas which are darkly developed in the bosom of the people, it will come about that France shall have her revenge by precisely that which in 1870 and 1871 made her weakness and misery. Unless truth be violently distorted (and in this matter anything is possible), our Bar-Gioras's, our John's of Gischala will never become great citizens; but their part will be played, and we shall perhaps find that, better than the prudent folk of common sense, they knew the secrets of destiny.

How was Judaism, deprived of its holy city and its Temple, to transform itself? How was Talmudism to emerge from the position in which, by force of events, the Israelite had been placed? We shall answer these questions in the fifth volume of our history. In a sense, after producing Christianity, Judaism no longer had any reason for existing. From that moment the breath of life forsook Jerusalem. Israel had sacrificed everything to the son of her affliction and had exhausted all her strength in giving him birth. The *elohim* whom men imagined they heard murmuring in the sanctuary : 'Let us go hence! Let us go hence!' spoke truly. It is one of the laws of great creations that the creator must virtually expire, handing on his life to another; when he has fulfilled his task, by inoculating with life him who is to continue it, the pioneer is no more than a withered stalk, a worn-out organism. It is, however, rare for this sentence passed by nature to be executed at once. Because a plant has borne its fruit, it is none the more willing to die. The world is full of those walking skeletons which survive the check put upon their progress. Judaism is of their number. History presents no stranger spectacle than this survival of a people in a spectral state, of a people which, during nearly a thousand years, has lost all capacity for action, has not written a readable page, has given us no acceptable teaching. Need we be surprised that, after having lived thus for centuries apart from the free atmosphere of humanity, in an under-

ground cavern, if I may say so, in a state of semi-insanity, it comes forth, pallid, dazzled by the light, etiolated?

As to the consequences for Christianity of the downfall of Jerusalem, they are so evident that they can now be pointed out. We have already, on several occasions, had occasion to afford a glimpse of them.

The ruin of Jerusalem and the Temple was for Christianity an unequalled piece of good fortune. If the reasoning attributed by Tacitus to Titus be authentic, the victorious general believed that the destruction of the Temple would mean the ruin of Christianity as well as that of Judaism. Never was there a greater mistake. The Romans imagined that in tearing up the root they were, at the same time, tearing up the offshoot, but the offshoot was already a separate bush living its own life. Had the Temple survived, Christianity would certainly have been checked in its development. The Temple would have continued to be the centre of all Judaic activity. It would never have ceased to be regarded as the holiest place in the world, a goal for pilgrims bearing their tribute. The Church of Jerusalem, grouped around the sacred precincts, would have continued, by the authority of its primacy, to obtain the homage of the whole earth, to persecute the Christians of Paul's Churches, and to exact the practice of circumcision and the observance of the Mosaic code from everyone who wished to call himself a disciple of Jesus. All fruitful propaganda would have been prohibited; letters testifying to obedience, signed by those in power at Jerusalem, would have been required of every missionary. A centre of irrefutable authority, a patriarchate formed of a kind of college of cardinals under the presidency of men like James, pure Jews belonging to the family of Jesus, would have been established and would have constituted a great danger for the infant Church. When we see St Paul, after being served so many ill turns, still remain attached to the Church of Jerusalem, we can imagine what difficulties a rupture with those holy men would have presented. Such a schism would have been considered as an enormity equivalent to an abandonment of Christianity.

Separation from Judaism would have been impossible ; and such a separation was as necessary a condition for the existence of the new religion, as is the severance of the umbilical cord for the existence of a new being. The mother was on the point of slaying the child. On the other hand, once the Temple was destroyed the Christians thought no more about it ; before long they were even to regard it as a profane place ; Jesus was soon to be all in all for them.

With the same stroke the Church of Jerusalem was reduced to secondary importance. We shall find it forming once more around the element which gave it its strength, the *desposyni*, the sons of Cleopas, members of the family of Jesus ; but it was no longer to reign supreme. That centre of hatred and exclusiveness once destroyed, the mutual agreement of the rival parties in the Church was to become easy. Peter and Paul were to be officially reconciled, and the terrible duality of infant Christianity was to cease to be a mortal wound. Left to oblivion in the depths of Batanæa and Hauran, the little group attached to the relatives of Jesus, to the James's and the Clopas's, became the Ebionite sect, and died a lingering death of insignificance and unfruitfulness.

The situation resembled in many ways that of present-day Catholicism. No religious community has ever had more internal activity, or a greater tendency to thrust original creations from its midst, than Catholicism during the last sixteen years. All these efforts have, however, remained sterile for a single reason, that reason being the absolute supremacy of the court of Rome. — It was the court of Rome that hounded from the Church Lamennais, Hermes, Döllinger, Père Hyacinthe, and all the apologists who had defended it with some success. It was the court of Rome that harassed Lacordaire and Montalembert, and reduced them to impotence. It is the court of Rome that by its *Syllabus* and its council has deprived liberal Catholics of all future. When will this miserable state of things end? When Rome shall no longer be the pontifical city, when the

dangerous oligarchy which has taken possession of Catholicism shall have ceased to exist. The occupation of Rome by the King of Italy will probably be a day counted in the history of Catholicism for an event as happy as the destruction of Jerusalem has proved to be in the history of Christianity. Nearly all Catholics groaned over it in the same way as no doubt the Judeo-Christians of the year 70 regarded the downfall of the Temple as the darkest of calamities. But the future will show how superficial this judgment is. Even while weeping over the end of papal Rome, Catholicism will derive from it the greatest advantages. To materialistic uniformity and lifelessness we shall see succeeding in its bosom, discussion, movement, life and variety.

THE END

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